

Proposals for the vocational training of disadvantaged young people

A recommendation issued by the Board of the Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB)

1. Starting position

The prospects for disadvantaged young people seeking to make a successful direct transition from school to vocational training remain inadequate. The general developments on the labour market, the decline in the number of jobs requiring reduced skills, the alterations which have taken place in company human resources strategies and the changes on the training market have all contributed towards this circumstance in the same measure as the continuing high proportion of young people leaving the school system without having acquired appropriate general skills. Alongside the fully qualifying training which takes place within the dual system and via full-time vocational school based training, a highly variegated transitional system lacking clarity has come into being which, despite the considerable financial investments made, has not delivered satisfactory results in the sense that participation in such schemes leads to subsequent training or qualified employment in the majority of cases.

Young people with poor marks in their school leaving certificate, those who have obtained no school leaving certificate at all, the less able and socially disadvantaged young people are most affected. The same applies to young people from a migrant background, who generally require targeted guidance and support if they are to be successfully integrated into vocational training.

The Board welcomes the supplementary statutory provisions which have been enacted in German Social Code Book III.

2. Definition

Young people requiring individual support, who are unable to access training and work without particular forms of assistance and who alone are not capable of securing their social, vocational and personal integration into society are considered to be “disadvantaged”.

The following groups are particularly viewed as being disadvantaged.

- Young people not yet in possession of apprenticeship entry maturity
- Young people displaying a lack of vocational aptitude
- Young people with learning difficulties
- The unskilled and semi-skilled
- The socially disadvantaged
- Young people who have not succeeded in starting or concluding training and whose training or labour market opportunities should be improved by further fostering of their employability skills.¹

Young people from a migrant background in particular often from part of these groups.

¹ cf. Federal Employment Agency: Specialised concept for vocational preparation educational schemes pursuant to § 61 German Social Code (SGB) III, as amended, Recommendation/Instruction for businesses 03/2006 (German language document)

3. Proposals

The basic idea behind the following proposals is an extensive “dualisation” of the vocational support provided to the disadvantaged.

For this reason, we need to strive to achieve fundamental reform encompassing horizontal and vertical cooperation on the part of all ministries and administrative bodies involved at all levels (Federal Government, federal states, local governments). The vocational training and integration of young people needs to be recognised as a task which extends over the whole of society and be funded accordingly.

Individual programmes will not be sufficient to address the prevailing situation either in quantitative and qualitative terms. A consolidated system for the provision of vocational integration support requires a seamless advisory and monitoring system and coherent routes via which such support is delivered on the following four levels.

- Vocational orientation (general schools), promotion of apprenticeship entry maturity
- Vocational training preparation
- Vocational education and training and
- Second chance qualification for young adults

The initial prerequisites for the provision of support are:

- an analysis of the correlative effects of the statutory foundations of supporting vocational training for disadvantaged young people (the Schools Laws of the federal states, German Social Code [SGB], II and III, VIII and SGB XII) and
- an inventory of all programmes and measures initiated by Federal Government ministries, federal state ministries, local governments, the Federal Employment Agencies and subordinate bodies.

The Board is calling for the establishment of a national initiative under the title of “School-leaving and vocational qualifications for all”.

The qualitative objectives are personal development, participation in society and employability. This will involve fostering positive attitudes towards work and value systems, improving general education and encouraging the acquisition of key skills. This should be based on the adoption of a joint approach on the part of the Federal Government, the federal states and local governments. The aims of such a process are as follows.

- Monitoring the progress of individual support up to the point where vocational integration is achieved.
- The stipulation of joint quality standards and joint management elements for the support of disadvantaged young people.
- According consideration to cross-sectional themes (such as gender equality, consideration of migrant backgrounds). Quality standards will also need to be developed for the integration of such elements.
- Establishment of regionally based, transparent educational management which coordinates the existing multifarious range of measures and funding provision in place in such a way so as to enable useful interlinking of specific educational and funding requirements in a region. The necessary networks will need to be put in place.
- Interlinking of the various learning venues in such a way so as to bring their respective strengths to bear and establishing a particular link with the company as a

learning venue which lends it the status of an equal partner. Double funding should be avoided.

The necessary funding provision for disadvantaged young people must not pursue separate pathways taking it outside the dual system. The principle of the regulated occupation, which involves tailoring vocational training to specific recognised skilled occupations and is so important in Germany, needs to be retained, and the guideline for reform proposals, even if these are extensive in nature, needs to remain recognised and qualifications related to vocational education and training. Familiarisation with the company and the provision of experience need to remain a continuous and increasing principle extending from vocational orientation to integration into employment.

Although this philosophy of integration formed a component part of supporting vocational training for disadvantaged young people from the very start, the result in practice was that the established form of learning venues became extra-company in nature, considerable elements of specialist training being delivered by educational providers and vocational schools.

The subsequent problems of anchoring this system within extra-company learning venues have remained to the present day: a lack of recognition of the training on the part of the young people themselves and the companies, transitional gaps during training and after conclusion of training and a narrow range of gender specific occupations pursued during prevocational training and training.

3.1 The company as a learning venue

If *the company as a learning venue* is to be re-established as the main focus of prevocational and vocational training of disadvantaged young people, a paradigm shift in funding policy is required in educational policy terms. The confusion which has prevailed up until now and the competition between different schemes for in-company “placements” are leading to rivalry between target groups seeking access to companies.

Instead of financing extra-company special programmes including a requirement for company placements, support structures should be developed which compulsorily stipulate in-company training in conjunction with educational providers or inter-company vocational training centres. For this reason, the objective needs to be the development of a *system of cooperation between learning venues*, in which the company constitutes the main venue for learning and the acquisition of experience and which enables the various other learning venues involved to bring their different strengths to bear within the orientation and training process. *Local government based associations of learning venues*, to which educational providers or vocational schools add external management services (in the form of competence assessment, development and continuation of individual support plans, additional learning support, conflict management and so forth) to the specialist training delivered by the companies, have proved their value.

The company as a learning venue needs to regain its status as the most significant area for the prevocational and vocational training of disadvantaged young people. Working within everyday operations enables young people to acquire learning experiences which make direct use of their endeavours. Integration into cross-company and cross-generational teams takes the evolution of a sense of responsibility and personal development to a new level.

Forms of assistance providing support during training

The effect of forms of assistance which provide support during training is an area which has not yet been fully utilised. More extensive use of support during training should be made by putting a wider range of provision in place for less able trainees and by establishing

simplified application and implementation procedures with the aim of staying ahead of the game in preventing young people from dropping out of training and offering the companies providing training the support they need in taking advantage of funding opportunities available in a timely and comprehensive manner. Such forms of assistance are particularly desirable in the case of smaller companies, since such firms generally do not have the diagnostic and specialist pedagogical knowledge required to be able to solve learning problems and the ensuing conflicts. For all these reasons, standard provision of forms of assistance to provide support during training is preferable.

The provision of educational services in conjunction with companies is a successful response to the lack of support structures for the in-company training of disadvantaged young people. External forms of assistance ranging from the assessment of aptitude and selection to diagnosis and implementation of funding requirements and extending to include organisational and financial support are required. Within such a process, achieving a new understanding of the roles played by the partners within the cooperative system is of overarching importance. Companies will open up to young people requiring special support in prevocational and vocational training and will take on responsibility for providing specialist training and company socialisation. Educational providers, vocational schools and inter-company vocational training centres (known by their German abbreviation of ÜBS) will view themselves as "(training) service providers" both for the young people themselves and for the companies. Providing support during training has proved to be a successful method for the structuring of cooperation systems between training venues. Vocational orientation, planning of training pathways, network management and the acquisition of companies, the provision of transitional support during training and quality management are all fields of activity to be deployed within the context of the overall occupational pathways of disadvantaged young people rather than being related to individual measures. Ongoing support and monitoring enable the establishment of an overall developmental context which extends beyond the individual stages of training, which minimises gaps in support and which also contains an inherent sense of personal continuity/reliability both for the young people themselves and for the companies. Notwithstanding this, support during training cannot replace the social education contained within the training measures.

Provision of support during training requires local networking. In order to allow these *local learning venue networks* to develop into standardised structural provision for disadvantaged young people, new or additional elements will need to be included in the support programmes.

- National, standardised funding of the establishment, coordination and efficient operation of cooperative training with the assistance of provision of support during training
- In the case of invitations to tender (Federal Employment Agency) and the release of funding, regional integration (appropriate acquisition of and support for companies) should be both required and promoted.
- Within these systems of cooperation between learning venues, companies should continue to be responsible for the costs of training (material and human resources costs), although additional company expenditure should attract funding. The costs in respect of coordination, management and provision of additional support described as being sustained by the educational providers will need to be financed in accordance with expenditure incurred.
- Financing for the funding of the young people (not the measure) should be structured on a reducing balance basis and be adjusted on a sliding scale to reflect the diminishing requirement for funding.

- If necessary, particular forms of mobility assistance (accommodation for young people, additional support from social education workers) should be provided via national cooperative learning venue models.

3.2 Improving individual entry standards prior to the transition from school to vocational training

In general schools, action is particularly required in respect of improving individual entry standards of socially disadvantaged pupils and pupils with learning difficulties by means of:

- the systematic development of a transitional system commencing in Year 7 and based on nationally agreed standards;
- fulfilling the task of work to be done by schools by ensuring the secure acquisition of general basic skills (reading, writing, arithmetic, use of media);
- providing ongoing support for so-called “groups at risk” in key school subjects such as German, mathematics and science at an early stage;
- providing systematic and individual support for young people at the interface between school and work by integrating career choice guidance and careers information to a greater extent;
- strengthening integrated school-based social work related to vocational themes and the world of work;
- expanding dual forms of vocational training for disadvantaged young people in their last two years of schooling via such approaches as the following:
 - production oriented approaches have proved their value and should be transferred;
 - pupil firms and workshops and cooperation with companies should be supported;
 - greater use should be made of practical classes to support less able pupils (“Practical classes plus”);
- improving the level of cooperation between general and vocational schools;
- expanding partnerships between schools and regional trade and industry.

The curricular structure of career choice preparation should be based on tried and tested approaches: early competence assessment and development, individual support planning, the development of self-directed learning competence as a basis for lifelong learning, career pathway planning, work experience placements with social education support, integrated school qualifications and the use of training modules which are nationally standardised wherever possible.

The Board is of the view that the provision of support for less able young people needs to be delivered at the earliest possible stage to enable a preventative approach to be adopted. For this reason, the Board calls upon the federal states to ensure that individual diagnosis of and support for pupils takes place as part of their commitment to achieving a greater level of quality within general schools and also to implement tried and tested models for the support of less able pupils across the board. Practical classes, which combine school lessons with extensive support and phases of practical experience within companies, have proved particularly successful. Teaching staff will need to undergo the necessary training.

3.3 Training modules

The introduction and piloting of training modules represents the development of a promising approach enabling the target group of disadvantaged young people to access qualified vocational education and training. The basic idea is to impart to these young people basic knowledge and skills and initial vocational experiences which are directly derived from existing training regulations and to do so during the phase of preparation for vocational education and training and without departing from the principle of the regulated occupation. The use of training modules involves a series of objectives.

- Improving the quality of prevocational training with the aim of enhancing learners' opportunities to progress to subsequent in-company training
- Reducing the number of dropouts from training by affording the young people a better opportunity to familiarise themselves with the requirements of the occupation in question and enabling companies to arrive at a clearer assessment of their entry standards for training.
- A further attendant aim is for these training modules to open up better chances on the labour market for young people and young adults who fail to make the transition to vocational education and training or do not succeed in directly doing so.

In addition to this and without prejudging the outcome, a further aim is to investigate whether adopting an innovative methodological and didactic concept involving extension of the training schedule and a degree of organisational flexibilisation can assist in enabling young people who require a particularly high level of support to achieve the goal of entering recognised full training. Notwithstanding this, the aim of such a pilot project cannot be to cast doubt on the principle of the occupation in regulatory terms. The object of the endeavours undertaken in this regard is to pursue nationally standardised, recognised and proven training stages and to enable a flexible approach to time stipulations. The stages of training and the modules need to be derived from recognised training regulations and allow a variety of didactical and methodological routes to be adopted as required in each case. Social competence and the ability to act as a team player are skills which are increasingly gaining in importance within the modern world of work. There is still a considerable need for development in respect of the deployment of training modules in these areas.

3.4 Second chance qualification for young adults

Second chance qualifications represent measures by which a vocational qualification may be obtained at a later date and may be considered as part of providing support for the disadvantaged. They are directed at young adults

- who are past the age where attendance of vocational school is compulsory,
- who already have experience of work or are in possession of partial vocational qualifications and
- who are unable to achieve a vocational training or re-training qualification via traditional educational measures on account of their prior school and vocational learning and their personal family situation.

The modular, in-service approach, which was one of the concepts developed during the series of pilot projects conducted by BIBB in the 1990's, represents an appropriate route for second chance qualification and needs to be pursued further, especially because it builds on existing competences, because credit can be given for training modules and partial qualifications and because it allows individualised training pathways. The Vocational Training act has shortened the period of employment needing to be demonstrated and has thus also facilitated access to the external examination.

3.5 Advanced training and continuing training for training and teaching staff

If the innovations stated are really to become an integral part of everyday training life, a particular degree of importance needs to be attached to advanced training and continuing training for training and teaching staff. Alongside securing and transferring the quality standards achieved in prevocational training, further development will be necessary in the following main areas.

- Joint advanced training for training staff involved in extra-company and in-company training
- Advanced training provision extending across measures and learning venues for the purpose of securing holistic quality of support
- Development of new initial and advanced training for the task areas of provision of support during training and for the provision of (initial) educational services within the context of cooperation between learning venues
- Compulsory inclusion of supporting vocational training for disadvantaged young people in initial and advanced training for teachers at vocational schools

4. Conclusion

The Board recommends that the main focus of training for less able young people should also take place on an in-company basis. In order to generate a greater degree of in-company provision for this target group, more ancillary support measures for in-company prevocational training and in-company training should be established within German Social Code (SGB) Book III (measures for the reduction of language and educational deficits, the promotion of specialist practice and specialist theory, for social education support and for forms of organisational assistance).

In addition to this, analysis of the effects of educational measures for disadvantaged young people needs to be expanded in a systematic way. Transition rates are an important indicator of the degree of success of the measures, but are insufficient. Companies should be able to access support provision in an unbureaucratic way and in line with their requirements. The existing regulation regarding funding to assist integration into work ought also to be extended to encompass the integration of less able young people into in-company training.