

EDITORIAL

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## **Securing a skilled workforce is the core mission of vocational education and training**

Dear readers,

Vocational education and training (VET) plays a major part in securing the supply of skilled workers in Germany. It will make an increasingly important contribution to solving the growing skills problem, and will prove its worth particularly when it comes to maximising the country's latent qualification potential. Young people who lack apprenticeship-entry maturity, people from migrant backgrounds and older employees are becoming the priority focus. To bring about the desired results for the domestic labour market, however, it is also vital to harmonise measures and initiatives in the different subsystems of our education system and to optimise the transitions between them. Accordingly, four tasks contributing to the implementation of a skilled workforce strategy take their place at the very top of the education policy agenda.

### **1. OPTIMISING PREVOCATIONAL EDUCATION**

If young people lack the maturity to embark on an apprenticeship, miss the point of vocational orientation or have integration problems for cultural reasons, it is symptomatic of deficiencies within the system of transition from school-based into vocational education. In the medium term, a near-seamless transition into the VET system will only be achievable by adopting an educational approach that is integrated and coordinated between Federal and Länder governments, with the following key features:

- Support for preschool children through fully inclusive and high-quality educational provision. The targets here are to foster the children's language and literacy skills and the necessary social skills for a successful start at primary school.
- Building on this, nationwide provision of schools requiring full-day attendance, with a curriculum that combines subject teaching oriented to competencies and learning outcomes with purposeful recreational sports, art, technology or music.
- To prepare for the transition into initial vocational education and training (IVET), the "education chains leading to vocational qualifications" approach must be brought to bear. What this means is analysis of potential from the 7th grade onwards, followed up with systematic vocational orientation combined with prevocational training which leads into a recognised training occupation. This aspect also calls upon business and industry as cooperation partners.

### **2. STRENGTHENING INITIAL VOCATIONAL TRAINING**

Thanks to the close interplay between casuistic and systematic learning in IVET, companies can rely on well-qualified skilled workers who give them an extremely important competitive edge. The collaborative approach to IVET between companies and part-time vocational schools, the principle of the recognised occupation, and the modernisation of training regulations in social partnership (between employers, employees & educators) are definitive quality-assuring elements which add significant educational value. They guarantee that IVET is firmly rooted and accepted in industry and society. In future the high quality of dual-system IVET must continue to be assured by

nationally standardised final examinations, administered by competent bodies, so as to maintain the confidence of both trainees and businesses in the broad market transferability of the qualification. Better marketing of these advantages of dual system IVET is another future priority, so that even more young people recognise VET as a genuine alternative to university.

### 3. DEVELOPING HUMAN RESOURCES IN COMPANIES – PROMOTING LIFELONG LEARNING

The increasingly evident skill shortage underscores the importance of far-sighted and systematic human resources development, particularly in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

Although they are aware of these challenges, their company size often limits their scope to embrace future-oriented human resources policies. Federal and Länder governments, associations and chambers are called upon collectively to engage in outreach work to businesses and to develop tailored concepts showing how to facilitate life-wide learning, including for older learners.

### 4. UNLOCKING LATENT POTENTIAL THROUGH RECOGNITION OF FOREIGN QUALIFICATIONS

It is a good thing that everyone in Germany with a qualification acquired abroad has the right, from now on, to have it assessed for equivalence with a German qualification. Corresponding certificates issued by the chambers will improve the transparency of foreign qualifications and give useful support to the integration of immigrants into the German labour market.

To sum up, the task of securing a skilled workforce not only requires all VET actors to take action, but also demands good coordination of the efforts of all parties involved!

Translation: Deborah Shannon, Academic Text and Translation, Norwich