



Vocational Education and Training 2020

Consequences for continuing development
of the recognised-occupation model

► The key challenges for vocational education and training (VET) are demographic change with all its consequences including the implications for securing the skilled workforce, and internationalisation in business and society and the associated task of integration. We must bear these aspects in mind for the continuing development of the VET system – that was one of the central messages at the 2011 BIBB Congress in Berlin. What are the likely repercussions for the continuing development of the

model of the recognised occupation? Within the framework of communication between research, policy and practice pursued at BIBB, this question was explored in order to gather answers from the principal players in VET policy, who influence the future elaboration of recognised occupations. This yielded a range of comments that are not only interesting but also practicable, and are presented in this article.

FEDERAL INSTITUTE FOR VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING (BIBB)

PROF. DR. FRIEDRICH HUBERT ESSER

President of BIBB

FEDERAL MINISTRY OF ECONOMICS AND TECHNOLOGY (BMWi)

JOHANNA BITTNER-KELBER

Ministerial Counsellor, Head of “Skilled workers, educational policy and vocational training” division

CONFEDERATION OF GERMAN TRADE UNIONS (DGB)

THOMAS GIESSLER

Head of vocational education and training policy unit

GERMAN ASSOCIATION OF CHAMBERS OF INDUSTRY AND COMMERCE (DIHK)

DR. ESTHER HARTWICH

Head of training division

GERMAN ASSOCIATION OF CHAMBERS OF INDUSTRY AND COMMERCE (DIHK)

DR. BEATE SCHEFFLER

Ministerial Director, Chair of vocational education subcommittee

FEDERAL MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND RESEARCH (BMBF)

THOMAS SONDERMANN

Ministerial Director, Head of vocational training directorate

UNIVERSITY OF BREMEN

PROF. DR. GEORG SPÖTTL

Head of “Work processes and vocational education and training” department at the Institute Technology and Education (ITB)

Prof. Esser_ *What potential does vocational education make available to meet the demand for a skilled workforce?*

Sondermann_ Our vocational education and training system imparts high-quality occupational competences and vocational qualifications. High transition rates into the labour market and low youth unemployment by international comparison underscore the significance of vocational education for the German employment system. The official vocational training statistics for 2011 supply further evidence: for those seeking training places, the situation has improved. Forecasts now assume a rising demand for skilled workers in years to come. Hence the German government and the Länder have agreed to increase total public and private expenditure on education and research to ten per cent of GDP. To that end, central government expenditure on education and research will be increased by twelve billion euros by the year 2013. In part this will be targeted at helping to raise the attractiveness and quality of vocational education and training even further, promoting permeability between the different sectors of education, and improving access to vocational education.

Dr. Scheffler_ Vocational education and training in all its different forms – dual system apprenticeships, full-time school-based initial vocational training and advanced voca-

tional training – is the pivotal element in meeting the demand for a skilled workforce. Targeted preparation programmes for management positions also come into this category. The options for credit transfer and admission to higher education studies for holders of vocational qualifications increase the attractiveness of vocational education and training, and help to ensure a rising proportion of highly qualified skilled workers in the labour market in future.

Bittner-Kelber_ Major challenges in the coming years are demographic change and changing qualification requirements. Initial and continuing vocational education and training are important components for securing the skilled workforce that is the bedrock of every company and can be critical to business success. This depends on companies taking a strategic approach to human resources policy, because by committing to initial and continuing vocational education and training they end up with skilled staff who have the exact qualifications they need as well as strong ties to the firm. Vocational education has a special status in this respect: almost two-thirds of all first-time employees begin their working lives with a dual-system apprenticeship. In future the competition for capable young people will keep intensifying because the number of school-leavers is falling for demographic reasons. That is why companies must also make efforts to attract the young people who have missed out on training so far. Knowledge has developed into a critical resource for the German economy. It is important to maintain and develop this through constant and targeted continuing vocational education for employees.

Prof. Esser_ *How must occupational profiles be designed to ensure lasting employability?*

Dr. Hartwich_ Training occupations should be oriented to the concrete, long-term needs of business. The core aim of initial vocational training is to instil practical occupational competence. The chambers of industry and commerce (IHK) organisation has been assuring training quality for many years through examinations which are geared towards the principle of the skilled occupation but make sufficient allowance for company-specific considerations. It is also important that we do not pack too much in to training regulations. We need a broad range of provision for our young people so that they manage the leap from the school bench to the workbench. To accomplish this, both two-year and three-year training occupations are required. It is high time to leave the stigmatisation of two-year training occupations in the past, where it belongs. Employability is supported by the proven system of dual-system apprenticeships, taught in cooperation between two learning venues.

Giessler_ In our view, modern occupational profiles presuppose a form of vocational education that has to satisfy several requirements:

JOHANNA BITTNER-KELBER

“Almost two-thirds of all first-time employees begin their working lives with a dual-system apprenticeship.”

- It is integrated and practical, and takes place within the tried-and-tested dual system.
- It fosters the development of technical, social and methodological competences and qualifications.
- It aims to develop maturity and identity, a sense of responsibility and the ability to take responsibility, as well as quality consciousness and high motivation.
- It equips learners with the competence to shape their own occupational and work biographies.
- It enables people to master different work situations and apply previously-acquired competences in new ways.
- It facilitates co-operation between hierarchical levels and fosters solidarity in action.
- And it lays the foundation for lifelong learning. Even during the initial vocational training phase, this calls for broadly-based occupational profiles, in which learners develop an understanding of interdependencies and a strong commitment to their work.

Prof. Spöttl_ Occupational profiles which only prepare for employability are not ambitious enough. If employability is all that matters, we need do no more than create job profiles that closely match the requirements of individual firms. Occupational profiles have higher aspirations than that. It is all about developing the capability to act appropriately and constructively in the broadest sense: acquiring occupational competence not only equips employees to be deployed flexibly, but also to make their own contribution to society beyond the workplace. Vocational training should play a part in educating mature citizens. Emphasis on the division of labour in the past eroded certain dimensions of the occupational principle. As production processes are restructured and responsibilities are shifted to lower levels, these are now regaining their relevance. With minimal or no division of labour, the important thing is the performance of cross-cutting tasks. Today these are the expression of a new skilled-occupational principle and should be central to the design of occupational profiles. Economic transformation is tending to result in broader tasks, for

PROF. DR. GEORG SPÖTTL

“Vocational training should play a part in educating mature citizens.”





THOMAS SONDERMANN

“When occupational groups are created, as many related occupations as possible should be found.”

which integrative competence is necessary to perform them effectively.

Prof. Esser_ *Against the backdrop of demographic change, thought is being given to creating occupational groups. What steps are necessary in your view in order to construct occupational groups?*

Dr. Scheffler_ Further consequences will ensue from the programme to develop competence-oriented training regulations. Consideration and comparison of competence expectations will spur on the creation of occupational groups. For the task that lies ahead, the training occupations accounting for the highest numbers of trainees should be systematically prioritised and made the starting point of competence-oriented training regulations for entire occupational groups. An especially congenial solution would be to commission the German government’s experts and the members of the KMK framework curriculum committee to develop the requisite company-based fields of activity as a joint task.

Bittner-Kelber_ In creating occupational groups, occupational fields must be identified which are connected, either via common technical training content or via customary or homogenous competences in a sector. Essentially the impetus for the creation of occupational groups should come from the social partners, particularly from representatives immersed in company-based practice. A comparative analysis of several related occupations with overlaps and features, which could be carried out by BIBB – as is currently being done for the industrial metalworking occupations – is certainly very helpful to inform the opinions of all concerned in preparation for the updating or modernisation of training regulations.

Occupational groups are intended to create more transparency for young people and companies and to enable greater mobility between occupations and sectors. Competence-oriented descriptions within the training regulations may help

to identify technical crossovers across training occupations, and so facilitate the creation of occupational groups.

Sondermann_ The modernisation of regulations for training occupations routinely involves giving some thought to the creation of occupational groups. Ideally, creating an occupational group is a way of ensuring that the full diversity of fields of specialisation and occupations are preserved – by instituting mutual recognition of certain examinations and work experience periods – whilst maintaining horizontal mobility on the level of training companies and trainees. In this way, companies may be able to offer more training programmes than they have ever previously considered. Trainees may then be able to spend their first year of training close to home, perhaps in a different occupation than they thought, but without wasting time, because credit for completed periods of training and tests passed can be counted towards a qualification in a different occupational. Whatever else is taken into consideration, thought should be given to defining an explicit programme of initial vocational training in a recognised occupation, and at the same time ensuring the greatest possible flexibility and mobility for all concerned. By the same token, as many related occupations as possible should be found in order to fully exploit the potential for all.

Prof. Esser_ *What possible difficulties might occur in the course of creating occupational groups?*

Prof. Spöttl_ I would like to start by saying that the idea of structuring of training occupations according to occupational groups – or better still, according to core occupations – is to be supported. Currently, however, there are no validated criteria that can be referred to for the creation of occupational groups. Identically worded occupational profile items, structuring according to common core skills, generic key skills and other approaches are inadequate for a convincing structuring of occupational groups. It is recommendable to develop content-based criteria for the creation of occupational groups. This is unlikely to be possible without research work.

Giessler_ There is no generally recognised definition of the concept. Occupational groups must not be created at the expense of the profile of individual occupations; things that do not belong together should not be spliced together.

Dr. Hartwich_ The IHK organisation has increasingly been promoting the creation of occupational groups for many years with its “Dual with choice” model. Since 2008 we have made sure that any procedure for updating training regulations focuses primarily on commonality with existing occupations rather than difference. The creation of an occupational group must not reduce diversity in the dual system to such an extent that companies can no longer provide training. The massive decline in school leavers will



DR. ESTHER HARTWICH

“The creation of an occupational group must not reduce diversity in the dual system.”

inevitably lead to a debate in the next few years on how many more specialised occupations are really needed. At the same time, if business calls for entirely new occupations it will be under more pressure than ever to justify their existence by means of evidence. We must not lose sight of the fact that new technologies alone are creating new qualification requirements, which must be reflected in existing or new training occupations.

Prof. Esser_ Which steps are necessary to promote permeability and compatibility?

Prof. Spöttl_ The Higher Education Acts of the German Länder now allow people with vocational qualifications to study at universities. Clarity is still needed on what must be done in terms of content in order to encourage careers with this perspective whilst averting the risk of estrangement from the practical world of work. The combination of erstwhile practical experience in the workplace with an academic qualification guarantees highly innovative employees. As yet there is no discussion of whether permeability from universities into the world of work or as preparation for the practical world of work is useful. Why should students at universities not concurrently be able to gain vocational certificates from chambers? To make this possible, chambers, continuing education providers and others must change their admission regulations. Another little-discussed question is how lifelong learning can meaningfully be realised. Combinations of employment and studies and consecutive phases of initial and continuing vocational education and training need further clarification.

Giessler_ Recognition of competences acquired in the previous stage of education is important. Coordinated curricula are required to facilitate this, along with more information on the options for vocational progression. Merely implementing the KMK guideline on university admission for those with occupational experience but without a university entrance qualification does not go far enough. We need more guidance options; there are too few bridges into higher education study, and precious little adaptation of curricula to this group of students with occupational experience. Study programmes compatible with employment are in short supply, particularly at the public universities. All findings point to this as a clear area of demand.

Dr. Hartwich_ Education and training initiatives – either at central government or at regional level – have been dealing with precisely this challenge for some years. The outcomes of various initiatives such as JOBSTARTER CONNECT, DECVET or ANKOM must be evaluated jointly with all stakeholders before launching new support programmes or research projects. Re-examining the need for new structures or regulations is another aspect of this. The framework conditions in vocational education have changed since the year 2005. For example, the declining numbers of applicants

DR. BEATE SCHEFFLER

“Almost two-thirds of all first-time employees begin their working lives with a dual-system apprenticeship.”



in the apprenticeship place market have made companies much more open when it comes to filling their training places. The universities, too, are increasingly opening their doors to holders of vocational qualifications. In this respect the negative tendency of the demographic trend can become a positive driver for changes in the education system.

Prof. Esser_ How will the German national qualifications framework (DQR) influence the development of initial and advanced training regulations?

Bittner-Kelber_ The mapping of initial and advanced vocational training regulations to the DQR delivers proof of the high quality and action-orientation already achieved in these areas of training. The competence profiles drawn up for the levels of the DQR will be used as an important indicator when elaborating them in future.

Dr. Scheffler_ The development of a European and, subsequently, a German qualifications framework is an essential foundation if cooperation in the field of vocational education up to the year 2020 is to be based on reliable instruments. The development of the DQR has not been an easy process in Germany because it forces us to question traditions. The decisions on levels that have now been reached and the development projects commissioned have created a good basis for further development of vocational education and training. Another necessary approach is the building of bridges to non-formal and informal learning, which is one of the aims of the EQF. With regard to the strategic objective of “realisation of lifelong learning and mobility”, it is an absolute necessity to institute better linkages between formal validation and informal or non-formal learning pathways. Here we should make use of the experience of other EU Member States.

Sondermann_ By referring to the descriptions of the eight DQR levels in terms of learning outcomes, the equivalence of the competences acquired in different learning and work contexts can be made visible. What we are already noticing very clearly, however, is that the introduction of the DQR is prompting new questions for vocational education and training, and reinvigorating old topics:

- The stepped nature of the DQR levels, for example, is a direct way in to the theme of permeability. Erecting a “Stop” sign on any of the steps, or leaving one in place, is unacceptable.



THOMAS GIESSLER

“Today more than ever, employees need all-round vocational and social competences.”

- Continuing efforts must be made to disseminate and encourage thinking in terms of the categories of learning outcomes. For example, in regulatory instruments: the policy of framing training regulations in terms of action-orientation since 2005 has already had major effects in that area. It is now time to promote equivalences even beyond the boundaries of the vocational education system.

Prof. Esser_ *Does the model of the recognised occupation offer the necessary flexibility to cope with future challenges?*

Giessler_ Yes! Today more than ever, employees need all-round vocational and social competences in order to hold their own in the face of changing conditions. The foundations for this must be laid in a broadly based and not overly specialised initial vocational training programme. Employees must be in a position to think independently and competently evaluate and shape their living and working conditions – for they are increasingly forced to return to the job market repeatedly to offer their labour, and called upon to take responsibility for their own work biographies. Employees need all-round competence to act appropriately and constructively – as a prerequisite for a participatory style of organisational development. Teaching this in the course of company-based training is demanding, and calls for special skills and methods of didactic communication.

Dr. Hartwich_ Another definite “yes!” from our point of view. Almost 340,000 new training contracts in industry and commerce alone in the year 2011 show that dual-system initial vocational training is still young people’s first choice. The dual system of initial vocational training has undergone continuous further development in recent years. We now have in-company introductory training (Einstiegsqualifizierung – EQ and EQ+), a form of provision for integrating less able young people into initial vocational training. For more able young people we are making greater use of highly codified additional qualifications within training regulations. Options for differentiation, such as the different contexts in which the industrial electrical and metalworking occupations are required, give companies flexible vocational training concepts that are supplemented with internal examinations such as the “workplace task” (betrieblicher Auftrag). Nevertheless we should also focus more efforts on dual study courses in future. In our view,

there is still more potential here which we could attract into dual system initial vocational training.

Prof. Spöttl_ The design of occupational profiles and the model of the recognised occupation offer sufficient means of responding flexibly to future challenges. The introduction of core skills and occupation-specific skills and the orientation to work processes allow us to bring occupational profiles into line with new challenges very rapidly. In recent years, however, Germany has adopted something of a fast-track approach to inventing new occupational profiles: easily 15 to 18 updated occupational profiles as well as ten new ones have been drafted in the course of a single year. This seems to run counter to what is thought appropriate. The main emphasis is on sectoral occupations with a high degree of specialisation, instead of looking for broad occupational profiles or experimenting with core or foundation occupations which could then be prudently refined – e.g. with carefully chosen fields of specialisation/specific focuses – to add depth.

Dr. Scheffler_ The concrete occupational profiles set out in the regulatory instruments should serve as the foundation, even in a significantly more flexible system of vocational education and training. One promising option that I see is the development of core occupations. Initial vocational training for these should take no longer than three years. Around these initial vocational training programmes, a system specialisations, advanced and continuing education modules, certificates and evidence of qualifications could be envisaged, always adapted to the requirements of the particular company. Whatever changed, employees would quickly be in a position to adapt to the new demands of their job.

Bittner-Kelber_ The recognised-occupation model represents a form of initial vocational training that imparts all-round occupational competence by virtue of its integrated approach. Combined with the possibility of specialisation, differentiation or additional qualifications, the recognised-occupation model can respond flexibly to future challenges while ensuring high quality initial vocational training.

Sondermann_ Germany’s strength in vocational education and training is thanks to the model of the recognised occupation within the dual system! Nevertheless, thought must be given to how far this system really enables all young people to complete initial vocational training successfully and then to embark on worthwhile employment. Creating training modules brings us closer to this objective, as long as they are used sensibly, for limited periods of time and amounts of learning, and in tried-and-tested areas. This approach should not be confused with an entirely module-based programme of initial vocational training, as is standard practice in certain other countries. ■