

Vocational education and training cooperation from a single source

Official statements on the Federal Government's common strategy and the work of the "Round Table"

International cooperation on vocational education and training has intensified and diversified over the past few years. A variety of policy areas are involved: apart from education policy issues, matters of development and foreign policy come into play, as do economic and labour market policy considerations. A "Round Table" was established in October 2013 as part of the Federal Government's common strategy for international cooperation "One-stop International Cooperation in Vocational Training", and the German Office for International Vocational Education and Training Cooperation (GOVET) was brought into being. GOVET will pool expertise across departments and organisational entities so that German activities in international vocational training cooperation can be developed and showcased coherently. The statements by the Ministers of State and State Secretaries at the Federal ministries describe how this will happen.

BWP Professor Böhmer, what are the Federal Foreign Office's priorities in international cooperation, and how do you feed them into the overall strategy?

BÖHMER International vocational training policy is closely linked to our foreign trade and investment promotion. The priorities are to tackle the shortage of skilled labour facing German companies both abroad and here at home, to lower the worryingly high levels of youth unemployment in many parts of the EU and to improve the social and economic situation in the many emerging economies and developing countries which are gradually discovering the value of vocational training.

To this end, the Federal Foreign Office cooperates closely with the other Federal ministries. Our main role is to provide legal and foreign-policy support for actors from the political, business and social spheres. We support vocation-

al training initiatives in many countries, "training partnerships", we do PR work in the countries concerned and work with the Chambers of Commerce Abroad to organise round tables. In this context, we are always seeking to convince companies in the host countries that it is worth investing in training. Complementary vocational training streams at German Schools Abroad can also help anchor the dual system of vocational training in a country.

The presentation created by GOVET is a good instrument which Germany's missions abroad can use to provide initial advice on the subject.

Reports by our missions abroad on vocational training can be used by everyone in the Round Table network. It is important that vocational training is a fixture in bilateral relations with the host countries so that we can carry out concrete initiatives there. Only if we know what the host country really wants to achieve in this area can we ensure that viable structures are put in place. "Projectitis" and insular solutions help no one.

"Our embassies and consulates general are often the first port of call when people want to get information about the dual system of vocational training or to launch cooperation."



Photo: Laurence Chaperon

PROF. DR. MARIA BÖHMER, Minister of State at the Federal Foreign Office

BWP Dr Schütte, what are the priorities of the Federal ministry responsible for vocational training when it comes to international cooperation?

SCHÜTTE Since the economic and financial crisis at the latest, cooperation with our European partners on vocational training has concentrated on improving job opportunities for young people.

The Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBWF) aims for sustainable reforms in the vocational training sys-

tems. We know that we can improve employment opportunities for young people in the mid to long term first and foremost if we initiate reforms aimed at the dual system of vocational training. Last year the OECD underlined the system's impressive success in moving people from training into the world of work, describing the transition in "A Skills beyond School Review of Germany" as "remarkably smooth". Against this background, we already launched measures for bilateral cooperation on vocational training with Greece, Italy, Latvia, Portugal, Slovakia and Spain in 2012 and concluded cooperation agreements.

Our cooperation with countries outside Europe is also commercially motivated. By offering partners such as Brazil, India or China structural advice and passing on know-how we can help to ensure an adequate pool of skilled workers for German businesses, especially SMEs. German companies complain of a lack of skilled workers both at home and abroad. We can help counter this, for instance, by promoting vocational training measures abroad.

Our overall cooperation strategy is based on a mutual exchange of learning and experience. The aim is to adapt the principles of the dual system to conditions in the respective partner country and to put them into practice. It is particularly important that the partner countries independently implement and continue to develop the vocational training strategies we help them draw up.

As the lead ministry for vocational training, the BMBF is responsible for the Round Table and for the central contact partner GOVET (German Office for International Vocation-

al Education and Training Cooperation) at the Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BiBB).

BWP Let's stay with European partners for now. They are the main focus for the Federal Ministry of Labour, too, aren't they, Mr Asmussen?

ASMUSSEN That's right. Given the high level of youth unemployment in some EU member states and the comparatively low figures in Germany, our European partners are greatly interested in particular in measures for the transition from school to work and in the provision of jobs or training places. That's why we have signed bilateral memorandums of understanding with the Employment Ministries in Italy, Spain and Portugal. The aim is to cooperate to promote and support youth employment in particular, for example by promoting mobility or exchanging best practices. Activities within this framework are launched in response to requests from the partner states and are tailored to each specific country. To this end the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (BMAS) works closely with the Federal Employment Agency. This bilateral cooperation is to be continued in the years ahead and expanded if other member states are interested. Memorandums of understanding can also play an important role in the international context. The BMAS can offer its expertise on the transition from school to work. The subject of youth employment also plays a prominent role in the G20 labour and employment ministers' process, where the main aim is to exchange best practices on tackling youth unemployment.

Diagram

The Round Table on international cooperation on vocational training



GOVET is the agency for the Round Table on international vocational training cooperation, which meets regularly at state secretary, ministry and working level. The aim is to implement the Federal Government's strategy on One-stop International Cooperation in

Vocational Training and to combine the expertise of the various actors.

For further information see: www.bibb.de/de/govet_2353.php

“As part of development cooperation, our partners’ competences and capacities to develop their vocational training systems are continually being developed.”



Photo: Bundesregierung/Benzel

DR. FRIEDRICH KITSCHELT, State Secretary, Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development

BWP Dr Kitschelt, what role does vocational training play in development work?

KITSCHELT Germany is the world’s largest bilateral donor when it comes to vocational training. In 2014 the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development’s (BMZ) commitments total around 160 million euros. Our main priority is the development of practical vocational training systems in line with the needs of business. We are particularly concerned with training in the informal sector, funding for education and training, rural areas, and training in the context of fragility and migration, and we look to gender equality.

Together with our partners we are developing a consistent framework for vocational training, strengthening institutions, improving vocational training curricula and thus helping to safeguard and increase productive employment with a wide impact.

Our many years of expertise in vocational training cooperation feed actively into the Federal Government’s common strategy for international cooperation in vocational education and training in the framework of a regular exchange, including in the Round Table, through the secondment of experts to GOVET and through coordination with German actors in the various countries with which we cooperate. The many years of experience of our implementing organisations, the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH and KfW (Reconstruction Loan Corporation), are also a factor in making use of established networks on the ground and providing partners with access to vocational training cooperation.

BWP Mr Machnig, where does the Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs see the priorities in the Federal Government’s common strategy?

MACHNIG As part of international cooperation, the Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy (BMWi) supports efforts by German companies to open up and secure foreign markets. The Ministry is in regular dialogue with institutions at home and abroad concerned with foreign trade. This dialogue aims not only to nurture bilateral economic relations but also to promote German companies abroad.

When it comes to developing bilateral economic relations, an important role is played by the mixed economic commissions. “Mixed” here means that representatives both of government and of interested businesses (associations and companies) take part in the regular meetings. The mixed economic commissions are concerned with a broad range of issues, in particular:

- promoting trade in goods between the economic partners,
- intensifying mutual investment relations, and
- improving technology transfer.

Recently the mixed economic commissions have also been expressing interest in Germany’s dual system of vocational training. Such inquiries are passed on to GOVET or the Round Table.



Photo: Bundesregierung/Benzel

“We want our perspectives on and approaches to international vocational training cooperation to complement, not to duplicate, each other.”

DR. GEORG SCHÜTTE, State Secretary, Federal Ministry of Education and Research

BWP Dr Schütte, what specific benefits has the Round Table brought your ministry in its first year?

SCHÜTTE Above all, transparency and coherence. Our vocational training system is fairly complex due to the large number of cross-cutting policy areas it affects, and the diversity of actors involved. Representatives of the business community, the chambers, trade unions, the Labour and Economics Ministries, the Federal Foreign Office and the Ministry for Development, as well as instructors, teachers and vocational training researchers – they are all constantly working together to improve the vocational training system. And, although there is basically a high level of consensus, they all repeatedly bring different perspectives to bear. That’s a good thing, and generally very fruitful. Nevertheless, it is important to us to present a coherent policy – particularly as our strategy continues to attract considerable interest from abroad. For example, the development cooperation approach and the BMBF’s approach to system reform should, ideally, complement each other. The Round Table helps in this regard as a coordinating body, so that we can speak with one voice to partners and present them with a coherent approach to cooperation.

BWP What does that mean in concrete terms?

SCHÜTTE Within just a short time, the Round Table has made it possible for all the different actors to keep each

other informed. That creates the basis for genuine cooperation. For instance, GIZ and the BIBB are jointly conducting appraisal missions in India and Mexico on behalf of the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and the Federal Ministry of Education and Research.

KITSCHALT The BMZ too regards coordination among German actors as very important. With its various regular formats at working level, ministry level and state secretary level, the Round Table is an appropriate and effective instrument to that end. It simplifies and improves exchange and coordination among the various German actors, particularly the Federal ministries. This means that Germany and its various actors present a coordinated front to our partners on the ground.

As well as the aforementioned vocational training projects in Mexico and India, we should also mention another one with South Africa, where we exchange and coordinate closely with other Federal ministries. The regular country specific consultations at working level with the BMBF also underpin this process. All in all, the Round Tables is an important element in ensuring that the Federal ministries present a more coordinated and more effective front in international vocational training cooperation, thus increasing the effectiveness of vocational training projects in the partner states.

BWP Mr Machnig, what specific developments can you see from your ministry's viewpoint?

MACHNIG At the fourth meeting of the German-Algerian Mixed Economic Commission in March 2014, the Algerian side again expressed profound interest in the dual system, and we were able to translate this interest into something concrete. In coordination with the BMBF, GOVET offered a range of instruments for developing and testing practice oriented, cooperative forms of vocational training in Algeria.

In addition, we welcome opinion-forming within the ministries with regard to extending the legal framework for training young people from non EU states in Germany. The BMWi published a study on this in April [2014], the "Impact Analysis of the Legal Framework for Qualified Professionals from Abroad". As companies which offer training are already noticing a substantial shortage of trainees in certain areas even now, we aim among other things to reach agreement among the Federal ministries on how to make it easier for trainees to come to Germany from abroad.

ASMUSSEN The Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, too, has clearly seen an interest on the part of our international partners in Germany's vocational training system and in measures to ease the transition from school to work. We regard cooperation in the Round Table as particularly fruitful here: the exchange and the bundling

of activities help us to reach a successful outcome and to find joint solutions. Setting up the Round Table has helped to bring the Federal Government's activities regarding vocational training under one roof for the first time and to promote exchange between the various actors in the field of vocational training, with all the education, economic, labour market, migration, foreign and development policy interests they bring to bear. This can only benefit everyone involved.

"The Round Table gives us the chance to strategically coordinate and further develop international vocational training cooperation among the various ministries. That creates positive synergies!"



Photo: clipimages/Imur Enck

JÖRG ASMUSSEN, State Secretary, Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (BMAS)

BWP What specific benefit do you see in the Round Table, Professor Böhmer?

BÖHMER Over the past few years, vocational training policy has become more and more of a cross-cutting issue with considerable relevance to foreign policy. It concerns various Federal ministries, the entire business community, companies, trade unions, the education sector, schools, political and social foundations and many others. Abroad, these various German actors need to speak with one voice if possible and present a coordinated approach. That's what the Round Table is for.

The Federal Foreign Office was the driving force behind the establishment of the Round Table, which, in our view, has proved extremely valuable. It gives us the chance to present concrete project proposals and inquiries from abroad to all actors and to decide together whether they are viable. Thanks to GOVET and the Round Table, we can effectively handle information and enquiries and pass them on to the relevant actors.

BWP Can you give us a specific example?

BÖHMER One example of extremely successful inter-ministerial coordination is our cooperation with Ecuador. The Ecuadorian Government is planning to introduce the dual system across the country. It has set in motion the necessary legislation and intends to make available US\$ 310 million to build 15 new vocational training centres and to re-equip 25 others. We are putting our wide ranging expertise in this field at the disposal of the Government in Quito.

BWP Finally, one last question to you all, hoping for a brief answer. What measures do you think need to be taken now to develop the Federal Government's common strategy?

BÖHMER The centralised contact GOVET should be made even better known to all the important actors through targeted PR work. And the staff should be further increased, perhaps by seconding staff members from other ministries or business associations.

I could imagine GOVET looking after the round tables set up abroad. In the medium term, offices could be established abroad to advise and assist governments, authorities, businesses, schools, etc. with their projects.

I am particularly keen to involve even more German Schools abroad. Vocational training streams at these schools function as models and are a good and persuasive additional way to export our successful dual system.



Photo: BMWi

"In view of the lack of trainees in certain occupations, agreement needs to be reached on how to make it easier for trainees to come to Germany from non EU states."

MATTHIAS MACHNIG, State Secretary, Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy

MACHNIG The Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy (BMWi) considers the continuation of the aforementioned activities as of benefit. To sum up, it can be said that GOVET has proven its worth. So we should thank the Central Office for International Cooperation in Vocational Educational Training for the work it has done. The BMWi is not aiming for any specific changes or additional measures at this point.

KITSCHALT We have made a good start on improving coherence among the ministries, but we should continue these efforts consistently. So we need to make targeted use of formats like the Round Table and GOVET and further develop them. Transparency, information and dialogue are important for even closer inter-ministerial cooperation. We at the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development see the potential for additional joint activities in this regard. So coordination among the implementing organisations in German vocational training cooperation should be actively encouraged and intensified. Support for GOVET as a service agency independent of the ministries and as a central point of contact for vocational training cooperation will remain a key element of our approach in future. The Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development therefore advocates strengthening and developing GOVET as a central point of contact. This would allow GOVET to establish itself internationally as an instrument of the entire Federal Government and thus as a "German brand".

ASMUSSEN The common strategy is now just over a year old. It is already clear that the actors involved benefit greatly from this exchange and that it has been possible to intensify and improve strategic coordination. Nonetheless, I believe that in the year ahead we should continue to concentrate on attaining the agreed goals and implementing agreed measures, as well as intensifying the substance of the exchange. Only in this way can we present a united front to our international partners in vocational training and fully meet all the expectations raised. Particularly with an eye to the cooperation agreements we have concluded, it seems particularly important to implement them comprehensively, efficiently and with the practical cooperation of all actors.

SCHÜTTE GOVET's one-stop-shop function has proven its worth as the first point of contact for interested partners abroad and should be extended. It is becoming clear that many states which are interested in cooperation with Germany in the field of vocational training can meet their needs for specialist information and contacts through cooperation with GOVET.

The range of information available from GOVET should be further developed and expanded with this in mind. In particular, we would like to appeal to all actors to enter their activities in the relevant databases, some of which already exist, and to thus help make these instruments truly effective.

Basically the foundation has been laid for a close and trusting partnership between the German actors. Now it is a matter of continuing to cooperate in this spirit.

(Interviews: Christiane Jäger and Arne Schambeck)

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