

Continuing vocational teacher training for company-based tutors

A German-Portuguese pilot project



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At the end of 2012, Germany and Portugal concluded a vocational education and training cooperation agreement with the aim of supporting the reform endeavours in the latter country. One of the main focuses of cooperation thus far has been the training of company-based VET staff. This plays an essential role in supporting and implementing the reforms. The present article reports on a bilateral project, in which a vocational teaching training measure for company-based tutors was developed and piloted.

Vocational education – and training staff in Portugal

Portugal’s training system is primarily school based. At upper secondary level, 56.3 percent of young people attend so-called science and humanities courses, which conclude with the *Certificado do Ensino Secundário* and prepare them for academic training. The second group of educational courses is vocationally oriented. In this case, young people acquire a double qualification in the form of the *Certificado do Ensino Secundário* and the vocational qualification of *Certificado de Qualificação Profissional*. The two most important vocationally aligned educational courses are the *Cursos Profissionais* and the *Cursos de Aprendizagem*, which are taken by a total of 32.1 percent of the annual cohort (cf. Table).¹ The vocational education and training courses offered by the German-Portuguese Chamber of Industry and Commerce are usually also considered as *Cursos de Aprendizagem*. The German-Portuguese Chamber of Industry and Commerce began to establish vocational education and training in Portugal based on the German dual system as long ago as 1983 and continues to develop this on an ongoing basis. It now maintains three training centres in Lisbon, Porto and Portimão and trains approximately 900 young people per year.

Despite their differences, both training models exhibit similar concepts regarding the role of training staff. In the companies, so-called “tutors” (*tutores*) are responsible for the implementation of the practical or company-based phase of training. In the schools and at the vocational training centres, the stakeholders responsible are referred to as “coordinators” (*coordenadores*). These are teaching staff who perform the main tasks within the scope of the company-based phases of learning alongside their teaching duties. Their remit also includes the acquisition of training places or practical placements at the companies.

Reforms in Portugal and the German-Portuguese cooperation agreement

Since the financial crisis in 2008/2009, many European countries have faced higher youth unemployment. This particularly affects the countries of southern Europe. In February 2014, the rate of youth unemployment in Portugal was 36.1 percent. This compares with 18.7 percent in 2008.²

In order to combat youth unemployment, Portugal instigated a series of reform measures primarily aimed at improving the transition from school to the world of work. In June 2011, the government presented a programme

¹ www.pordata.pt. Data was sourced from the “DGEEC/MEC – Recenseamento Escolar” (retrieved 17.10.2014).

² Cf. <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/tgm/table.do?tab=table&plugin=1&language=de&pcode=teilm021> (retrieved 28.05.2015)

Table

A comparison of Portuguese vocational training courses

Comparison criteria	Training courses	
	Cursos Profissionais	Cursos de Aprendizagem
Proportion of young people within an age cohort	21.6 %	10.5 %
Responsibility	ANQEP ³	IEFP ⁴
Learning venue for theoretical teaching	State vocational schools	State vocational training centers
Duration	3 years	3 years
Proportion of company-based learning time	approx. 10 % (about 12 weeks in total)	approx. 40 % (about 48 weeks in total)
Practical phases at the company	During or at the end of school-based training	Alternates with theoretical teaching at the vocational training centres

outlining a new educational system for the years 2015 to 2020. Within this programme, the objectives which include bringing about significant improvement at individual levels of schooling, technical training and vocational education and training are of central significance. In 2013, the Ministry of Education (MEC) introduced new VET pilot courses (*Cursos Vocacionais*) in order to reduce the number of school dropouts⁵. The objective of these two-year courses, which feature a higher proportion of company-based learning than is the case in the ANQEP and IEFP courses (about 50 %), is to facilitate more rapid access to the labour market for young people.

In order to support the reform process, the Portuguese Ministry of Education concluded a three-year cooperation agreement with the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) on 5 November 2012. The fields of activity covered by this agreement were set out in detail at a subsequent European Educational Summit staged in Berlin (December 2012). It was agreed that the primary theme of cooperation would be the training of VET staff. Initial focus was placed on the issue of the pedagogical training of company-based tutors, given the fact that they play a key role in the promotion of work-integrated learning concepts. Within the context of direct experience with processes along the value-added chain, the aim is that they should support young people in the acquisition of employability skills. For this reason, they are faced with pedagogical and didactic requirements such as structuring of the learning

process, motivation of young people and the evaluation of performance. The purely professional training the tutors themselves have undergone does not usually equip them for such tasks.

Initial specific preparations for a joint pilot project for the pedagogical training of company-based tutors were made at the inaugural meeting of the German-Portuguese Working Group in Lisbon on 3 and 4 June 2013.

Continuing vocational teacher training for company-based tutors

The pilot project was based on the following principles.

- In order to get to know one another and achieve a better understanding of the Portuguese training context, extensive networking initially needed to take place between all those involved in the project⁶. The aim was to use this as a basis to conduct an empirical research with a view to arriving at a more precise identification of the training requirements of the tutors.
- The objective was for the pilot project to encompass tutor activity within the two most important forms of vocationally-oriented training. Because, as described above, the responsibility for these courses lies with various ministries and institutions, the intention was for the broadly based approach selected for the project to integrate all relevant state VET agencies in Portugal.
- In accordance with the concept of the “appreciative comparison” (cf. UHLMANN/KREWER/ARNOLD 2014), the training measure was to be structured in a dialogue-based way. The aim was for the scheme to build

³ Agência Nacional para a Qualificação e o Ensino Profissional – ANQEP (National Agency for Qualification and Vocational Education and Training). ANQEP is a public body under the supervision of the Ministry for Education and Science (*Ministério da Educação e Ciência – MEC*).

⁴ Instituto do Emprego e Formação Profissional – IEFP (Employment and Vocational Training Institute). IEFP is a public body under the auspices of the Ministry of labour and Social Solidarity (*Ministério da Solidariedade, Emprego e Segurança Social – MTSS*).

⁵ According to EU figures, the school dropout rate in Portugal in the years 2011 and 2012 was 23.2 % and 20.8 % respectively. Cf. http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-13-324_de.htm (retrieved 15.03.2015)

⁶ The project participants on the Portuguese side were the Ministry of Education, ANQEP and IEFP. On the German side, the German-Portuguese Chamber of Industry and Commerce acted as a link between the other partners. These were BIBB, GOVET and the BMBF, which coordinated and financed the project. The BIBB project group included SIGRID MARTIN (also a lecturer in trainer aptitude courses) and BERND RUDEL from the Board for Vocational Education and Training of the Association of German Chambers of Industry and Commerce (DIHK).

on the know-how of German VET experts and on the experiences of the training system for company-based training staff in Germany whilst also being implemented in a flexible manner so as to be adaptable to the general conditions governing Portuguese vocational education and training via a continuous networking process.

- In order to overcome language and cultural barriers, the intention was for the training measure to be conducted by Portuguese lecturers. Teaching staff from the vocationally oriented courses, who also exercise the function of a coordinator, were to be trained by German experts.
- The German-Portuguese Chamber of Industry and Commerce acted as the main contact point and project sponsor. Because of its many years of training activities, its good networking with Portuguese agencies and its knowledge of the country and culture, the German-Portuguese Chamber of Industry and Commerce was an important strategic partner for both the Portuguese and German stakeholders within the cooperation agreement.
- Finally, the plan was that BIBB would continue to provide assistance after the end of the official term of the project (February 2014 – November 2014) in the form of an impact analysis in order to maintain support for Portuguese reform endeavours in the field of VET staff.

Empirical investigation

Due to the lack of sufficient empirical findings regarding company-based training staff in Portugal, interviews were initially used to help identify the structures of companies providing training and the fields of activity of tutors. In order to achieve the broadest possible base of information, coordinators and trainees were also interviewed alongside the company-based training staff. The aim in adopting this approach was both to arrive at a better understanding of the various training models and to gain insights into the central role played by the coordinators and into their possible support requirements. For this reason, the *Cursos Profissionais*, the *Cursos de Aprendizagem* and the *Cursos Vocacionais*, the new vocational pilot courses, were all included in the empirical investigation. The BIBB project group focused on the training needs of the VET staff by designing guided interviews based on the “circular questioning” method (cf. PFEFFER 2001) and subsequently agreeing these with the Portuguese partners.

Overall, interviews were conducted with 21 tutors, 17 coordinators and 23 trainees. Members of the German-Portuguese Chamber of Industry and Commerce with good knowledge of the Portuguese and German vocational education and training systems sat in on each of the interviews, which usually lasted between 45 and 60 minutes. Evaluation was carried out by the BIBB project group with

support from the German-Portuguese Chamber of Industry and Commerce.

The essential results of the investigation can be summarised as follows:

Profile of the tutors interviewed: Two groups could be identified in the companies surveyed. These were tutors with responsibility and a management function and the group of tutors who provided direct support to the young people. The interview partners mostly belonged to the first group. In many cases, these tutors have a higher education qualification and comprehensive occupational experience. They had not usually been prepared for their tutoring task. The same applies to the second group of tutors, who also only have a professional qualification and not a teaching qualification.

Spectrum of tasks: The most important tasks of the tutors with management responsibility are to organise the company-based phases of training or practical placements and to manage the other tutors. This also includes reaching agreement with the coordinators with regard to the so-called “activity plan” (*plano de atividades*), which contains the requirements made of the young people for the company-based phase of training. This plan is drawn up by the coordinators on the basis of training standards stipulated by ANQEP. The significance of cooperation with the coordinators is also discernible when it comes to the assessment of learning success. This is conducted by the tutors at regular intervals and communicated to the coordinators.

One main task focus for both groups of tutors is to foster the motivation of the young people, especially at the beginning of the company-based phase, and to promote communication with and management of the young people in a way that is conducive to training. This is a major challenge for most interviewees. Some respondents pointed out a lack of discipline on the part of the young people, and others complained that in many cases the young people did not yet exhibit the behaviour expected of them in the company. One important reason for these assessments is likely to be the fact that in some cases many respondents had high expectations of the company-based phase of training. These ranged from a desire that young people should “know what work means”, that they should gather “plenty of practical experience” and that they should learn “how to deal with customers” and extended to include such expectations that young people nowadays should “acquire the social and professional competences” that will enable them “to cope effectively on the labour market”.

Requirement for continuing training: In overall terms, the tutors surveyed expressed a wish for continuing training in the following thematic areas:

- Dealing with young people in a more effective way
- Implementation of curricular stipulations (from the “activity plan”) into a company training plan
- Motivation of the young people
- Methods of learning in the work process
- Evaluation of trainee performances
- Organisation and self-management

After discussions with the project partners from the BIBB project group, the following five continuing training modules were developed on this basis:

- “My role as a tutor”
- “Planning training in the company”
- “Implementing training in the company”
- “Dealing with trainees”
- “Motivating trainees”

The guide for skilled workers providing training in Germany offers an important basis in this regard (cf. JABLONKA/MARTIN/ULMER 2013). The empirical investigation made it clear that the pedagogical challenges facing company-based training staff exhibit many similarities in both countries.

Following further coordination with the Portuguese side, this served as the basis for the design of a course with a total duration of 35 hours. Because of the occupational activity of the tutors, the plan was for the measure to be implemented in two parts.

Implementation of the training measure

The initial step was to train Portuguese lecturers to deliver the tutor training course. The BIBB project group also developed materials and a course guide for this purpose. Eleven lecturers, all of whom were school-based teaching staff, took part in the continuing training course (October 2014). One of the main focuses was the practice of training methods to support company-based learning. The training, which consisted of short lectures, group activities and discussion sessions, was conducted by a German trainer with consecutive interpretation.

The first part of the tutor training directly followed on from the lecturer training. Three trained lecturers now organised the continuing training course in which the eleven tutors participated. Ongoing networking took place with the German trainer and the BIBB-German-Portuguese Chamber of Industry and Commerce project group in order to adapt the continuing training modules to the general conditions in Portugal on a continuous basis. Amendments and supplements primarily related to the proposed procedural plan, the weighting of the topics and the materials made available to the tutors at the end of the course. With regard to the topics, it emerged that the aspects of central

significance to the participating tutors were the training methods for company-based learning, the evaluation of performance, the formulation of learning objectives and the preparation of a training plan.

Forecast and transfer

The continuing training was very positively evaluated by the lecturers and the tutors. They stated that it was very helpful in overall terms for the implementation of more practically oriented training. The Portuguese institutions were also highly satisfied with the results of the pilot project and now intend to introduce modularised training for tutors across the country on the basis of the measure conducted. At a policy level, the project fostered collaboration between the most important state VET agencies in Portugal and created a good basis for further bilateral projects to support the Portuguese reform process. A second project has already been agreed for the advanced training of teaching staff in the schools and training centers and is scheduled to be initiated in the second half of 2015. The experiences gathered within the scope of the German-Portuguese pilot project may in addition offer an important foundation for vocational education and training cooperation with other countries. VET staff are a key factor in the success of reform processes.

They are stakeholders in companies and schools and play a crucial part in the implementation of reform measures. They need to be trained and strengthened in order to perform this role. The tutor project has instigated fundamental steps in Portugal in this regard. The concept of the German-Portuguese pilot project and the approach selected could therefore be a model for reforms to the training systems in other countries, in particular in respect of staff providing training in companies. ◀

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