

Dual initial vocational training following degree course dropout?

Findings of the BIBB Experts Monitor

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With the growing number of unfilled training places, the demand for more permeability in the education system has extended to asking how degree course dropouts might be recruited for dual initial vocational training. For this purpose, knowledge about the interests and possible reservations of companies and higher education dropouts is helpful. The article investigates these on the basis of a survey of experts.

Extending permeability in the education system

Efforts to improve permeability in the education system are nothing new. The idea of enabling vocationally qualified individuals to access higher education without a formal higher education entrance qualification was already being discussed back in the 1960s and 1970s (cf. inter alia JAHN/BIRCKNER 2014). Attention has turned only very recently to permeability from higher education into vocational education. Key contributory factors, in equal measure, have been the rising number of degree course dropouts as well as unfilled in company training places, and the associated concern about the future supply of skilled workers.

In the meantime a series of initiatives has been set in train within view to integrating higher education dropouts into dual initial vocational training (cf. inter alia Zentralverband des Deutschen Handwerks 2013). As of the start of 2015, 18 new projects are being supported under the heading of "Boosting support to small and medium-sized enterprises to recruit degree course dropouts as apprentices", a line of funding within the JOBSTARTER plus¹ programme.² The great number of initiatives indicates that both companies and degree course dropouts can certainly be matched up; equally, it suggests that certain factors may exist which deter them from engaging with each other. Knowledge of these is still very sparse, however. For example, evidence exists that a good proportion of the training companies

would provide dual initial vocational training in recognised occupations to degree course dropouts (cf. inter alia Zentralverband des Deutschen Handwerks 2013). Equally there are indications that a certain proportion of degree course dropouts are intent on obtaining a dual initial vocational qualification (cf. HEUBLEIN/SPANGENBERG/SOMMER 2003; BECKER/GREBE/BLEIKERTZ 2010). Little or no research has been done, however, into which factors might underlie companies' as well as degree dropouts interest or lack of interest (cf. JAHN/BIRCKNER 2014, p. 6).

Investigation based on a survey of experts

Findings on interests and reservations can be expected to yield not only pointers for the development of initiatives to integrate degree course dropouts into dual system initial vocational training but also points of reference for quantifying the available potential. Therefore the BIBB Vocational Training Experts Monitor (cf. box) took up these themes in 2014 in order to explore them through analysis of the assessments of vocational education and training experts. Along with various other questions on the integration of degree course dropouts into dual initial vocational training

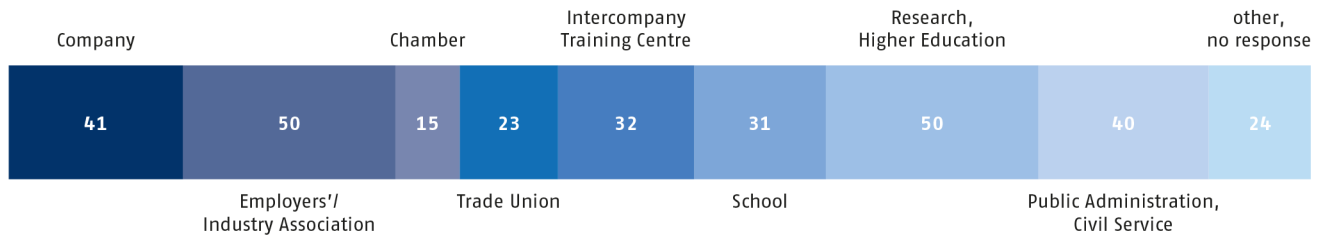
BIBB-Vocational Training Experts Monitor

The Vocational Training Experts Monitor (or Experts Monitor for short) is an online survey system operated by BIBB. Its aim is to collect the expert opinion of vocational education and training experts on current vocational training policy issues and to feed it into the education policy debate (cf. EHRENTHAL/KREKEL/ULRICH 2004). The experts surveyed for this purpose are recruited from individuals who are professionally engaged with vocational education in different institutional contexts (cf. Figure, below).

¹ This is one of the total of four lines of funding from the first funding round of the programme "Jobstarter plus – training for the future" delivered by BIBB on behalf of the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (cf. www.jobstarter.de and www.bmbf.de/foerderungen/23755.php (in German); retrieved 22.12.2014).

² Cf. press release by BMBF (Federal Ministry of Education and Research) of 22.01.2015 (www.bmbf.de/press/3729.php; retrieved 13.03.2015).

Figure
Institutional affiliation of participants in the 2014 Experts Monitor



(cf. EBBINGHAUS et al. 2014), the experts were presented with two sets of statements. One set contained statements on possible arguments which, in the view of companies, might support or discourage their provision of dual system training in recognised occupations to degree course dropouts. The other set comprises statements on arguments which, in the view of degree course dropouts, might support or discourage their commencement of a dual initial vocational training. The statements were derived from current strands of debate about the integration of degree course dropouts into dual system initial vocational training, and from the objectives of initiatives relevant to this strategy (cf. inter alia WANKA et al. 2013; Zentralverband des Deutschen Handwerks 2013; BECKER/GREBE/BLEIKERTZ 2010). Of the approximately 1,100 experts registered in the Experts Monitor, 306 (28 %) took part in the survey (cf. Figure).

Recruitment difficulties as a principal motive of companies

The arguments that experts see as impelling companies to train degree course dropouts in dual occupations can be concentrated into two underlying motivations: one relates to the qualification profile of degree course dropouts, the other to the heightened difficulties of attracting apprentices (cf. Table 1).³ It is apparent from the responses that recruitment difficulties can be viewed as the stronger of the two motivations, both by experts overall and by the experts based in companies. The urgency of this problem is apparent from the fact that the general difficulties of recruiting apprentices, with an agreement rate of almost 80 per cent from each group, are emphasised as an even stronger argument for taking an interest in higher education dropouts than the problems of recruiting particularly high-performing young people, which is seen by almost 70 per cent of all experts and almost 65 per cent of those based in companies

as a driver of interest in providing dual initial vocational training to higher education dropouts (cf. Table 1).

The prominence of the vacancy-filling difficulties does not mean that the qualifications of higher education dropouts are unimportant. What is apparent here, however, is that the totality of experts assess the interest of companies to be higher than the companies themselves do. This is most clearly the case with regard to the potential of higher education dropouts to be equipped with advanced vocational qualifications for management roles following initial vocational training. 56 per cent of all experts believe that this could induce companies to train higher education dropouts. The same figure for the company-based experts is ten percentage points lower at 46 per cent. Clear differences are evident in relation to the assumption that a comparatively low manpower commitment for supervision of higher education dropouts is an argument in favour of this target group. Almost half of all experts espouse this view, which is held by four out of ten of the company-based experts (cf. Table 1).

The reservations against higher education dropouts can also be categorised into two groups, namely reservations which relate to the expectations of higher education dropouts and reservations concerning in-company practices of social integration (cf. Table 2). With regard to reservations of both kinds, it is evident that possible reservations on the part of companies are assessed differently by the totality of experts than by the company-based experts. For instance the experts assume that concerns about inflated expectations during initial vocational training might be most likely to deter companies from training degree course dropouts. For the companies themselves, on the other hand, the possible career advancement expectations that degree course dropouts might have after completing their initial vocational qualification pose the greatest deterrent to targeting this group. Concerns about the willingness of degree course dropouts to integrate socially in the workplace are less frequently expressed, overall, by representatives of companies than by the totality of vocational training experts.

³ Assignment of the individual arguments to motivations is based on the results of Principal Component Analyses which were calculated using the responses of all experts.

Table 1
Arguments **supporting** company provision of initial vocational training to degree course dropouts

	Totality of experts		Experts from companies	
	Agreement rate (%) ¹	Mean value ²	Agreement rate (%) ¹	Mean value ²
Qualifications of degree course dropouts				
Degree course dropouts can be trained as junior staff destined for management positions.	56	3,68	46	3,27
Degree course dropouts are equipped with special technical and methodological competences.	53	3,50	49	3,41
Vocational training of degree course dropouts requires less supervisory manpower.	47	3,31	39	3,10
The risk of losing degree course dropouts to higher education after initial vocational training is low.	45	3,25	46	3,28
Recruitment difficulties				
It has become more difficult generally to fill training places.	79	4,10	78	4,22
It has become more difficult to recruit school-leavers with a higher education entrance qualification as trainees.	68	3,75	64	3,60

Explanatory note for all tables:

¹ The agreement rate states what percentage of all experts and of those from companies agreed (on balance) with the given statement. For example, 56 % of all experts agreed with the statement that degree course dropouts can be trained to become junior staff destined for management. The same figure for experts from companies was 46 %.

² The mean value quantifies the average agreement with the given statement, calculated using the scale points from 1 = "do not agree at all" to 5 = "agree completely".

Table 2
Arguments **detering** company provision of initial vocational training to degree course dropouts

	Totality of experts		Experts from companies	
	Agreement rate (%)	Mean value	Agreement rate (%)	Mean value
Inflated expectations				
Degree course dropouts have unduly high expectations of in-company dual initial vocational training.	43	3,21	29	3,05
Degree course dropouts want to shorten the training period so much that benefits are too low to offset training costs.	36	3,00	22	2,59
Degree course dropouts expect to be able to advance their careers rapidly after dual initial vocational training	31	3,19	39	3,00
Insufficient willingness to integrate socially				
Companies fear that degree course dropouts cannot fit in with a group of trainees who have come directly from school	45	3,24	37	2,85
Companies fear that degree course dropouts will continue their track record of dropping out.	26	2,79	29	2,70

Future potential of a dual occupational qualification: a major incentive

Likewise, the arguments that might support or deter higher education dropouts from taking up dual initial vocational training are also influenced by two different motivations. Supporting factors are the qualification and development opportunities opened up by dual initial vocational training as well as the social status it secures. Detering factors are focused on social stigmatisation and unattractive material conditions (cf. Tables 3 and 4).

That said, very similar assessments of the motivations are arrived at by the totality of experts and by the subgroup of company-based experts. While there is no denying that reasons might exist which could deter higher education dropouts from taking up dual initial vocational training, the experience of dual initial vocational training as a drop down the social ladder and as proof of failure at university is the barrier thought to carry the most weight, both by all experts and by the company-based experts. Nevertheless, the arguments supporting a shift of orien-

Table 3

Arguments **supporting** commencement of dual initial vocational training by degree course dropouts

	Totality of experts		Experts from companies	
	Agreement rate (%)	Mean value	Agreement rate (%)	Mean value
Qualification and development opportunities				
Skilled workers with a dual qualification are in demand in the labour market.	87	4,11	93	4,34
Interesting occupations can be learned in the dual system.	80	4,00	85	4,20
Dual initial vocational training includes a very high proportion of practical training.	76	3,97	78	4,05
Dual initial vocational training makes it possible to take advanced vocational examinations.	45	3,27	49	3,40
Securing social status				
Dual initial vocational training helps to boost the sense of self-esteem.	63	3,67	68	3,65
A dual initial vocational qualification secures social status.	59	3,52	61	3,63

Table 4

Arguments **detering** commencement of dual initial vocational training by degree course dropouts

	Totality of experts		Experts from companies	
	Agreement rate (%)	Mean value	Agreement rate (%)	Mean value
Social stigmatisation				
Dual initial vocational training is perceived as a drop in social status.	42	3,24	34	3,05
Commencing dual vocational training makes the failure at higher education visible.	40	3,17	32	2,97
Degree course dropouts do not want to put themselves on the same level as trainees coming directly from school.	34	3,09	32	2,95
Degree course dropouts fear being stigmatised in the workplace as a failure.	24	2,74	20	2,53
Unattractive material conditions				
Trainees' pay is too low compared to earnings in the case of immediate employment.	38	3,12	27	2,73
Labour market opportunities for degree course dropouts are very good even without a vocational qualification.	9	2,25	7	2,12

Explanatory notes on the tables, cf. Table 1

tation within the dual system are given distinctly stronger emphasis, and particularly the future prospects that open up in the labour market. It is striking that experts from companies give even greater emphasis than the totality of experts to the advantages for higher education dropouts, and consider the deterrents to be less prevalent. For example, 93 per cent of all company-based experts agree with the statement that the demand for skilled workers in the labour market might motivate degree course dropouts to take up dual initial vocational training, in contrast to 87 per cent of all experts (cf. Table 3). Conversely, 42 per cent of the totality but only 34 per cent of company-based experts take the view that degree course dropouts might therefore refrain from dual vocational training because they categorise this as a drop in social status (cf. Table 4).

Wide-ranging activities necessary to make full use of the potential

It is hoped that the recruitment of higher education dropouts will unlock further potential for dual vocational training. In recent years the dropout rate from Bachelors' degree courses has been a relatively constant 28 per cent (cf. HEUBLEIN et al. 2014). The majority of new entrants to higher education – and hence also of subsequent dropouts – have not previously completed an initial vocational training programme (cf. SCHELLER/ISLEIB/SOMMER 2013). Dual vocational training thus provides higher education dropouts with a possibility of gaining a vocational qualification in a recognised occupation regardless.

The surveyed experts also see an added value. They make the assumption that both companies and degree course dropouts stand to gain if those who quit higher education

without graduating can be integrated (more intensively) into dual initial vocational training. From the companies' point of view this mainly relates to securing the supply of skilled workers, and for higher education dropouts as individuals, most essentially it relates to securing their prospects of future success.

But the findings also show that the integration of higher education dropouts into dual initial vocational training is not necessarily an automatic success. Even if the arguments that support the commencement of dual initial vocational training are overwhelming from the experts' perspective, there are still reservations.

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Although the company-based experts assess these to be lower overall than the totality of experts, the nature of the reservations nevertheless implies that isolated interventions are most unlikely to be sufficient to break them down and ultimately overcome them. Thus, counteracting the potential concerns of higher education dropouts about the loss of status associated with switching to dual initial vocational training will only be possible if measures addressed specifically to both higher education dropouts and companies are accompanied by broad-based information campaigns, in order to retrieve dropping out of higher education from the taboo zone, but also to reinforce (once again) the social prestige of a dual initial vocational qualification. ◀

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