

The training occupation as the basis for lifelong learning in the employment biography



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Vocational education and training in German-speaking countries is traditionally aligned to the concept of the training occupation. Both the precise nature of this concept and the requirements made of it have regularly shifted in the past. The present article provides an overview of this development and describes current action areas with regard to structuring the training occupation in a future-oriented way so as to serve as the starting point for a flexible employment biography.

Life in the old dog yet – the concept of the regulated occupation in German-speaking countries

The concept of the training occupation is constantly being called into question despite the fact that the labour market in Germany is organised along occupational lines and many members of the population continue to acquire their first vocational qualification within the dual training system. The training occupation lies at the core of the dual system. It contributes both to societal stability and integration and to company and macro-economic productivity. As well as aiming to deliver professional training, the training occupation in its present form also represents an important basic pedagogical principle and acts as a state system regulator. By way of contrast, the employment occupation is of considerable significance to both individuals and society in terms of securing a basic livelihood, societal participation, biographical continuity, personal autonomy, and meaning in life (cf. KRAUS 2006).

It is important to draw a distinction between the employment occupation and the training occupation. Whereas the employment occupation merely refers to the design of the division of labour within the employment system itself, the training occupation constitutes an important interface between the educational system and the employment system. The training occupation is a structured educational programme that forms part of the (vocational) education training system. It is based on practically relevant work and business processes and, as defined in Section 1 of the Berufsbildungsgesetz (BBiG) [Vocational Training Act],

imparts the skills, knowledge and capabilities necessary in order to exercise a qualified occupational activity in a changing world of work. Both the educational perspective and employment prospects need to be taken into account when assessing the usefulness of the concept.

History of the training occupation

Modern vocational education and training has its roots in the craft trade traditions of the Middle Ages. It has undergone a long process of development, during which critical debate on the concept of the regulated occupation has constantly brought about changes to the way in which an occupation is defined and in the degree of significance accorded to it. The starting point for the view of the regulated occupation we hold today has its basis in an attitude to work that is influenced by medieval thought and theology (cf. CONZE 1972). During the second half of the 18th century, ideas of individual preference and societal utility (cf. BLANKERTZ 1969) began to come to the fore to replace notions of divine vocation and assignment of social status. The beginnings of industrialisation in the 19th century altered the economy and ways of life, and the modern performance principle became established. These changes also brought about the institutionalisation of vocational education and training. As well as being responsible for the occupation, schools also took on the task of "reproduction of societal labour capacity" (HARNEY 1999). Since the 1920s, the form and weighting of work experience and teaching and opportunities for co-determination in terms

of shaping vocational education and training have formed main objects of educational policy debate. This culminated in the passing of the BBiG in 1969 (cf. GREINERT 1998). At the end of the 1970s, industrial sociological and pedagogical criticism of the concept of the regulated occupation (cf. BECK/BRATER 1978; BECK/BRATER/DAHEIM 1980), led to a “despecialisation” of training occupations. The accusation that large groups within the population were suffering disadvantage and that important competences for personal development, enhancement of social status and occupational and professional advancement were absent from vocational education and training resulted in a broader and more substantial design concept for occupations (cf. LAUR-ERNST 2000).

Increasing Europeanisation reignited discussions regarding the viability of the concept of the regulated occupation. In the 1990s, the Anglo-Saxon concept of modularisation (cf. REULING 1996) was controversially aired as a reaction to the companies’ increasing need for flexibility. The aim was that modules would facilitate rapid adaptation of the competences of skilled workers. The reform policy adopted by the Federal Government in 1996/97 opted for a form of modularisation within the context of the concept of the regulated occupation (cf. KLOAS 1997). Training occupations were structured in such a way so as to offer internal differentiation. From 2009 onwards, modular concepts based on training occupations were piloted in the transitional area and in second-chance training for adults.

This brief retrospective view illustrates that the repeated adaptations to the concept of the training occupation, some of which have been fundamental in nature, have taken place as a reaction to societal and technical changes. Current debate does not dispute the fact that adaptation is needed because of the shift in general economic and social conditions. There are, however, controversies in terms of the extent of adaptation needed, as to whether the notion of the occupation itself should be called into question or whether the emphasis should be much more firmly placed on modernisation of the concept (cf. KRAUS 2006) and with regard to which guidelines should characterise the process.

The training occupation within the area of conflict of different functions and requirements

Challenges and the requirement for adaptation arise from the area of conflict created by the different functions the training occupation is expected to meet. Whether the occupation can fulfil the purposes of the individual, of society and of the economy and therefore also of vocational education and training itself is being called into question (cf. BAETHGE/BAETHGE-KINSKY 1998). Whereas some believe the concept of the regulated occupation to be too rigid by

dint of the fact that it is no longer able to offer individuals useful guidance for their journey through life, (cf. VOG 1997), others stress the “lasting social cohesion” it provides (cf. KONIETZKA/LEMPERT 1998).

The debate surrounding employability is lending significance to a further personally related paradigm, which is primarily aligned to the needs of the labour market (cf. KRAUS 2006, pp. 61 ff.). With the support of minimalist adaptation training, the demand for mobility and flexibility formulated within the context is subordinating vocational training entirely to the dictates of the market and to this extent may be viewed as a counter-concept to the regulated occupation which views comprehensive employability skills as the target dimension of vocational education and training processes.

It should be noted that alignment to both company requirements and to educational policy and societal needs has always enabled stakeholders to find sustainable and future-oriented solutions which have contributed to the success of the dual system and to the international recognition it enjoys. The concept of the regulated occupation has proved itself to be an effective instrument to support training at the intermediate skilled worker level and has helped to consolidate and expand Germany as a production location and the country’s economic performance in the high-tech sector in particular.

The training occupation as the starting point for qualified skilled work

Although large numbers of people do not permanently work in the occupation in which they have trained, vocational education and training remains the prerequisite for employment in many related areas of activity. This means that vocational qualifications continue to exercise an important function in the world of work and act as a link between training and employment (cf. DOSTAL/STOOR/TROLL 1998, for central functions cf. also Figure, p. 28).

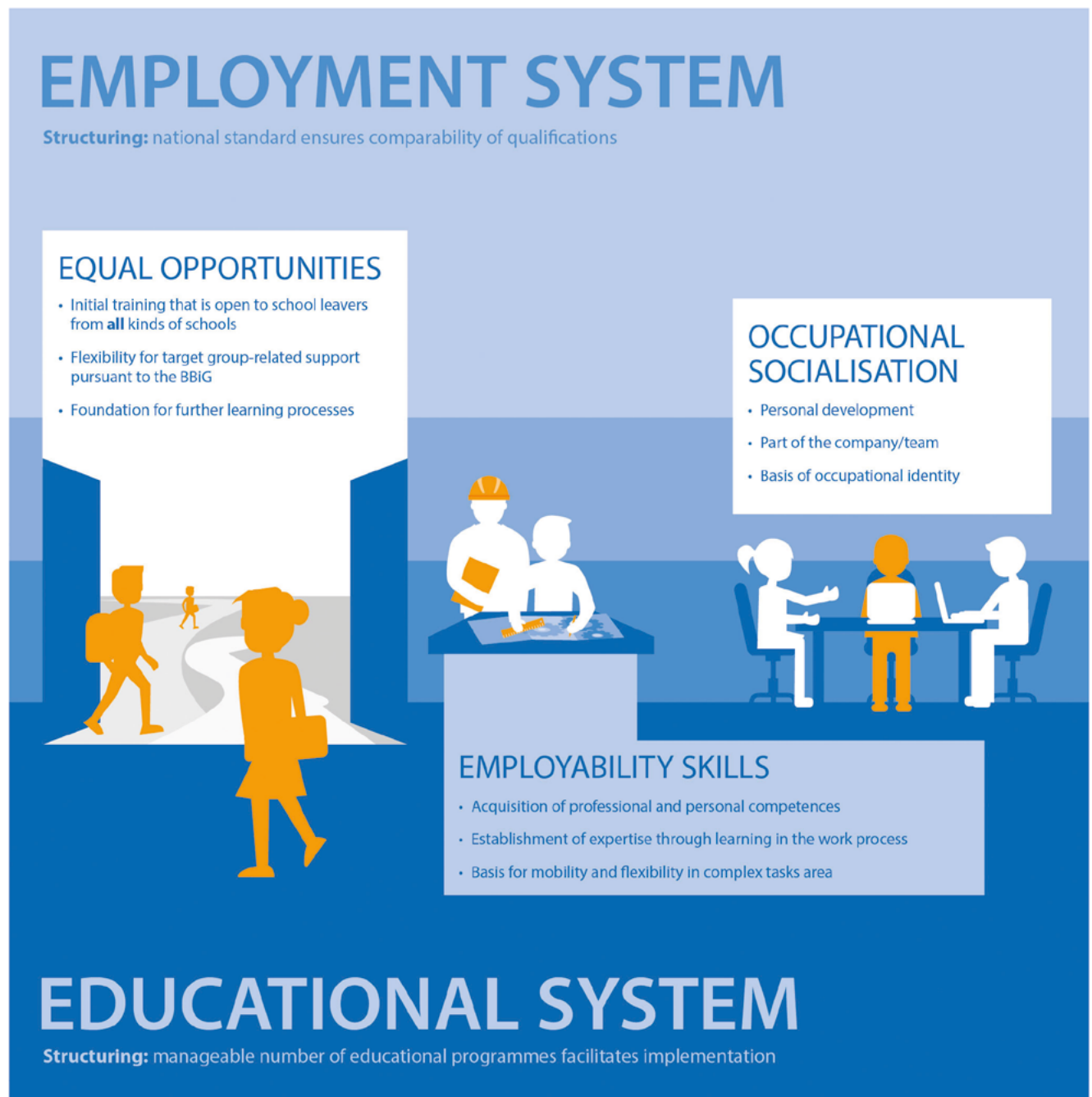
For this reason, our plea below is for the training occupation to be structured in a sustainable way with the aim of undergoing expansion in respect of areas where there is potential for flexibilisation. Three aspects should be emphasised as being relevant to achieving success in this regard.

Acquisition of broadly-based employability skills

Company-based training is closely related to the work process, ensuring that it remains up to date and is aligned towards company needs and fields of deployment. This achieves an adequate level of employability, both with regard to the company providing training and beyond. The didactic processing of content at the vocational school supplements the expertise that trainees have acquired in

Figure

Functions of the training occupation at the interface between the educational and employment system



the company. This supports transferability and mobility, which in turn guarantee that persons with vocational qualifications can be deployed flexibly. The binding stipulation and examination of minimum standards also makes the qualifications transparent, and this facilitates both the recruitment of skilled workers and the planning of company-based continuing training. We may therefore state that dual training aligned to the concept of the regulated occupation imparts contents which to a large degree provide the necessary skills for mobility and flexibility in complex

task areas. Within the process, consideration is accorded to specific company circumstances via structuring instruments in the form of specialisms, areas of deployment and elective and additional qualifications in order to facilitate flexibility within the concept of the regulated occupation. These forms of structuring offer different solutions for the necessary specialisations in company training contents. Duration of training is guided by the amount of time required to acquire broadly based employability skills within a domain.

Equal opportunities

In the debate surrounding the concept of the regulated occupation, consideration needs to be accorded to the fact that this is a form of initial training that should be open to school leavers from all kinds of schools. Flexibility is already built into the BBiG via possibilities to shorten the duration of training, the opportunity to complete training on a part-time basis and support provision for target groups with special needs. The ability to access training below the level of the higher education entrance qualification means that the training occupation remains an important instrument for securing equality of opportunity and societal participation. The ambitious objective of offering all target groups training provision which is relevant to the labour market and which is oriented towards broadly based employability skills should be retained in future. If the training occupation is also conceived as the foundation for further learning processes in working life, then the development of recognised advanced and continuing training concepts and the securing of permeability both within the VET system and to higher education are essential prerequisites.

Occupational socialisation

The experiences which trainees gain in their companies also leave their mark in terms of personal development. This means that, as a societal institution, the training occupation also supports the acquisition of social competence and autonomy skills in direct reference to company fields of deployment rather than being solely aligned to the imparting of professional contents. Companies which commit to dual training believe that this is a particular strength of this training pathway. Company processes continue to be organised along the lines of a division of labour and are still characterised by cultural influencing factors and by the specific need to achieve harmonisation at interfaces. The significance of this will not decrease in future. Investigations in innovative fields of activity (cf. HACKEL/BLÖTZ/REYMERS 2015) show that the ability to work as part of a team, communication skills and work in interdisciplinary groups are all increasing in importance and are critical to success. These are further defining elements of the training occupation which need to be retained.

Vocational education and training once again under pressure? – Current challenges

The current debate may lead to the impression that the concept of the training occupation is in difficulties once more. Demographic and technological developments are important drivers in this regard:

- The fall in the number of school pupils has led to significant shifts in supply and demand on the training places market. A further factor is the changed behaviour displayed by pupils towards higher education. In some occupations and regions, this is already making it difficult for trainees to access occupationally-specific schooling that is near to their place of residence or work. Further flexibilisation of dual training would exert even more pressure on the vocational schools, the partner within the dual system.
- The increasing dynamism of societal and technical changes is cited as an argument for the decline in significance of learning an occupation. Digitalisation is creating new requirements for the training of employees and is necessitating new forms of training (cf. ZINKE et al. 2017).

In the light of these challenges, there is a need for concepts and adaptations which develop the concept of the regulated occupation further and make it future proof instead of calling it into question.

Concepts for occupationally-specific schooling need to be drawn up, even in times of demographic change. It will be necessary to take account of the increasing heterogeneity of learners and of companies and regions. Possible solutions may include appropriate structuring of training occupations and the development of concepts for internally differentiated teaching. Well-trained vocational school teachers are a further basic prerequisite.

There is also a need for concepts for training in connection with the spread of digital technology. Account must be taken of the fact that tasks are increasingly taking place in digitalised systems, and these need to be mastered and understood. This makes it necessary for training to encompass the whole of the digital system from the very outset. Information technology is a fundamental part of this overall system and also represents an important learning aid and work tool. With regard to the imparting of training contents, consideration needs to be given at the same time to adaptations to move from a concept that tends to be inductive towards an approach which is much more deductive (cf. ZINKE et al. 2017). This would also produce changes in the structuring of teaching/learning processes.

A further requirement placed on the training occupation is to lay the foundations for future learning processes. Autonomous discovery of topics within the scope of project work should be further reinforced, and greater emphasis in vocational schools should be placed on connectivity with other educational and training routes in advanced training as well as in higher education. In order to achieve this, greater consideration than before needs to be given to the imparting of domain-specific information competence for the purposes of research and tapping into knowledge and to

the appropriate use of specialist terminology (cf. HACKEL/BLÖTZ/REYMERS 2015).

The present article shows that it is worthwhile to continue to work on the educational concept of the “training occupation”. The advantage of the training occupation as a starting point for competent continuing learning during

adulthood lies in the fact that it is a form of training which is based on transfer and expansion from the beginning. In order to retain connectivity in a changing world of work, dual training should concentrate even more strongly than before on learning in system correlations, problem-solving skills and connectivity. ◀

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Translation from the German original (BWP 3/2017): M. S. Kelsey