



## Cooperation of BIBB with international partners

► Exchanging experience across national borders is of ever increasing importance, especially in the field of vocational education and training (VET), considering the challenges posed by globalisation. In keeping with its legal remit, the German Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB) cooperates with VET institutions around the world. The current focal areas of BIBB's international work are projects relating to comparative and transfer research, involvement in the processes of European VET policy, and advisory services for the international education market. This article begins by looking at the position of BIBB in the international context, and goes on to report on a partners' meeting convened by BIBB and attended by 16 VET institutions from various countries in Europe. This provided a host of opportunities for exchanging views on current issues in European vocational education and training.



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### The position of BIBB in the international context

The European single market, increasing international competition and the growing mobility of European citizens require our national education system to adopt a more European and more international outlook. On the one hand, Germany aims to make use of cooperation and exchange with other countries as a means of introducing best practices in vocational education and training (VET); it is also keen to contribute actively with its profile and know-how to the development of practice-based VET, particularly in Europe. This is why, from as early as 2002 in its "Strategy paper for the internationalisation of German vocational education and training",<sup>1</sup> BIBB has stressed the importance of cooperating with partners and building international networks: "Co-operation on a partnership-like basis and international networks are now providing a crucial impetus promoting quality, flexibility, mutual and interdisciplinary learning."<sup>2</sup> The aim is to enhance Germany's international profile as a centre of training expertise and promote the competitive strengths of the German VET system. Accordingly, BIBB has now concluded cooperation agreements with 18 vocational education institutions and supra-national organisations. These include not only research institutes from countries with such different vocational education traditions and systems as Australia, Korea and Russia, but also organisations like the vocational education centres of the EU (Cedefop) and the UN (UNESCO/UNEVOC). In addition, BIBB works with numerous other countries worldwide within the framework of German development cooperation rather than under direct agreements. In that context, BIBB is principally a provider of advisory services at system level. The main aim of this advisory work is to improve the given vocational education and training systems in order to create more favourable conditions for the employment of the target groups concerned. BIBB is involved in this kind of work in Ghana, Uzbekistan and Vietnam, for example. European cooperation in vocational education and training has gained substantial momentum from the declarations of

the European Councils held in Lisbon, Stockholm and Barcelona, and above all from the Copenhagen Process to enhance cooperation in vocational education and training which began in 2002. Hence, cooperation within the European Union (EU) on vocational education policy is another high priority for Germany. BIBB is involved in European developments in a variety of ways: by supporting the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) with concept development for the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), for example, or by carrying out a research project concerning the implementation of ECVET (the European Credit System in Vocational Education and Training) in 33 countries.

### “Partners’ Meeting 2006” – a conference report

To cement cooperation within the field of European vocational education but also to bring fresh impetus to long-standing agreements, BIBB initiated a forum for European VET institutions as part of its programme of international conferences. From March 19 to 21, 2006, the BIBB in Bonn hosted its first “Partners’ Meeting” (Partnertreffen). The conference was held with two aims in mind: firstly, to address the topical issue of the EQF, and secondly, to create a forum in which existing relationships could be renewed and new contacts established. Delegates were invited from 14 European vocational education institutions which either have cooperation agreements with BIBB, or with which BIBB currently engages in close cooperation. The participating institutions, most of which were represented by their directors, were from the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, France, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland, Serbia, Spain, Turkey, and the United Kingdom.

### From EQF to NQF: Experience and perspectives

The European Qualifications Framework (EQF) is a mechanism which should bring greater transparency to educational systems and the competences acquired through education and training. It is also intended to promote permeability between different educational pathways and systems and enable mobility throughout Europe. Germany and other European countries are in the process of addressing the implications for national VET systems, but the most immediate issue is the development of appropriate national qualifications frameworks (NQF). The heterogeneous nature of education systems in Europe means that individual states will respond to the European framework in different ways. It is therefore both important and useful for Germany to engage in the exchange of information at the earliest possible stage in its development of a national qualifications framework.

Four countries with different vocational education and training systems reported to conference delegates on their

### Partners in international cooperation with BIBB (as of June 2006)

Australia	The National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER), Adelaide <a href="http://www.ncver.edu.au/">www.ncver.edu.au/</a>
Belarus	Republican institute for vocational education (RIPO), Minsk <a href="http://ripo.unibel.by/">http://ripo.unibel.by/</a>
Czech Republic	National institute for technical and vocational education (NUOV), Prague (formerly: VUOS) <a href="http://www.nuov.cz/">www.nuov.cz/</a>
European Union	European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop), Thessaloniki European Network of Reference and Expertise (ReferNet) Thessaloniki <a href="http://www.cedefop.gr">www.cedefop.gr</a>
France	Centre d’Etudes et de Recherches sur les Qualifications (CEREQ), Marseille <a href="http://www.cereq.fr/">www.cereq.fr/</a>
Hungary	National institute of vocational education (NIVE/NSZI), Budapest <a href="http://www.nive.hu/">www.nive.hu/</a>
Iran	Technical and Vocational Training Organization (TVTO), Teheran <a href="http://www.irantvto.com">www.irantvto.com</a>
Italy	Istituto per lo Sviluppo della Formazione Professionale dei Lavoratori (ISFOL), Rome <a href="http://www.isfol.it/">www.isfol.it/</a>
Korea	Korean Research Institute for Vocational Education (KRIVET), Seoul <a href="http://www.krivet.re.kr/">www.krivet.re.kr/</a>
Latvia	Vocational education centre (PIC), Riga <a href="http://www.izmpic.lv">www.izmpic.lv</a>
Netherlands	Centrum voor Innovatie van Opleidingen (CINOP), 's-Hertogenbosch (formerly: PCB) <a href="http://www.cinop.nl/">www.cinop.nl/</a>
Russian Federation	Institute for the development of vocational education (IRPO), Moscow <a href="http://www.irpo.ru/">www.irpo.ru/</a>
Slovak Republic	State Institute of VET of the Slovak Republic (SIOV), Bratislava <a href="http://www.siov.sk/">www.siov.sk/</a>
Slovenia	Centre for vocational education and training (CPI), Ljubljana <a href="http://www.cene-stupar.si">www.cene-stupar.si</a>
Thailand	Department of Vocational Education at the Ministry of Education (DOVE), Bangkok <a href="http://www.dsd.go.th">www.dsd.go.th</a>
Turkey	Technical and vocational education research and development centre (METARGEM), Ankara <a href="http://www.iskur.gov.tr/">www.iskur.gov.tr/</a>
UNESCO/UNEVOC	UNEVOC Center, Bonn <a href="http://www.unevoc.unesco.org/">www.unevoc.unesco.org/</a>
USA	American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), Washington <a href="http://www.asacc.org/">www.asacc.org/</a>

experience to date: the United Kingdom, Hungary, Spain and Germany. Spain and the United Kingdom already have national qualifications frameworks whereas Hungary and Germany only started to develop their national frameworks against the backdrop of the EQF consultation process.<sup>3</sup> The United Kingdom, not unusually among Anglo-Saxon countries, has a long tradition of outcome-based qualifications frameworks. However, not only are there significant differences between the qualifications systems in Anglo-Saxon countries, but they are also developing in increasingly divergent directions. The English colleague’s talk dealt primarily with the question of how European policy influences national systems.

In Hungary the EQF is viewed as a challenge to which the national qualifications system is expected to gear up and respond. There is no sense of incompatibility between the national system and the EQF, the full implementation of

which is planned as part of a fundamental modernisation and restructuring of the Hungarian education system.

Spain set up its own national framework for qualifications three years ago. Problems are posed by the assignment of levels, however, in that some of the EQF levels are not described precisely enough or not sufficiently distinct from one another. The Spanish colleague explained that improvements were necessary in this area. This shortcoming was also criticised in Germany's response to the EQF.

In Germany, the Board of BIBB has set up a common platform for the views of the government and industry on the EQF. A roadmap for the development of a national qualifications framework has been drafted, and a steering group appointed. However, there are numerous outstanding issues which must be resolved before Germany can implement a national qualifications framework. The most important prerequisite is the willingness of all actors to work together. Central management and flanking research and development programmes will also be necessary. A possible time-

frame for the development and implementation of a national qualifications framework in Germany might be the period from 2006 to 2010.

In the informal atmosphere of a "cooperation market" on the final day of the conference, the participants had an oppor-

tunity to cement existing relationships or indeed to make firm arrangements for particular cooperation projects. The delegates from new EU member states particularly welcomed this opportunity to make themselves and the work of their institutes known in the broader European setting. The partners' meeting was felt to have been especially useful in bringing together the heads of so many leading European VET institutions in one place to establish contacts and exchange views.

The plan was that this "Partners' Meeting 2006" in Bonn, the first such event, should be the prelude to a regular programme of meetings to provide a means of intensifying and cementing international relationships and opportunities to cooperate. The announcement that another meeting is already scheduled for 2007 in Madrid is therefore especially gratifying.

### Cooperation in practice: Advisory project at the Latvian vocational education centre

One participant at the meeting was Ilze Brante, the head of Latvia's vocational education centre (PIC) in Riga. At the conference, not only was a cooperation agreement signed between the PIC and BIBB, but concrete arrangements were made for ongoing cooperation between the two institutes. BIBB has been in close contact with the PIC since 2004,



Ilze Brante, director of the Latvian vocational education centre (PIC) in Riga, and Manfred Kremer, President of BIBB, after the signing of the cooperation agreement

and has been able to build on the good reputation it has enjoyed in Latvia since the Transform Programme in the 1990s. Established in 1994, the PIC comes under the authority of the Latvian Ministry of Education and Science. Its main tasks are the development of VET and quality assurance in initial and continuing vocational education and training (IVET and CVET) within the state-regulated Latvian education system.

Following Latvia's accession to the EU and stabilisation of the economy, the demands upon workers in the country have also changed. In order to meet the labour market demand for highly skilled workers, to facilitate quality improvement in vocational education and training, and to expand cooperation with social partners, professional associations and allied enterprises, the PIC is leading a national programme supported with EU structural funding for the "Working out of Unified Methodology to Increase Quality of Vocational Education and to Involve and Educate Social Partners". The project is initially set to run from March 1, 2005 to May 31, 2007. After the project coordinators at PIC had agreed upon advisory themes with BIBB in October 2005, experts from BIBB visited Riga at the request of the PIC to advise on the involvement of social partners, on the mapping of occupations with a view to modernisation in particular sectors, and on quality assurance. Moreover they reported on experience to date under Germany's new Vocational Training Act. Further advisory missions are planned. The endeavour to achieve a smooth transition into cooperation on the basis of partnership when the Transform Programmes reached the end of their term has been successful, in the case of BIBB's cooperation with Latvia. In the spirit of BIBB's advisory philosophy,<sup>4</sup> giving due regard to special characteristics of the partner country, tried and tested elements of the German VET system were put forward, which Latvia could use as an aid to developing its own VET system to meet the needs of the future. At the same time, this cooperative approach is a graphic example of the nature and scope of the cooperation agreements that the partners' meeting was intended to inspire. ■

#### Notes

- 1 *BIBB International: A Strategy paper for the Internationalisation of German Vocational Education and Training. In: BWP spezial no. 7; supplement to BWP 4/2002, p. 45 ff.*
- 2 *As above.*
- 3 *A detailed account can be found at [www.bibb.de/en/25552.htm](http://www.bibb.de/en/25552.htm)*
- 4 *Cf. BIBB International, as above, p. 20*