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EDITORIAL

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### **Many bright spots – but shadows too!**

Dear readers,

Thanks to a wide range of diverse initiatives, an expansion in education and training in Germany has emerged from many years of stagnation.

#### **MEASURABLE SUCCESS**

The number of school leavers without a qualification has fallen by 39 percent, and we have also seen a reduction of 61 percent in unplaced apprenticeship applicants. The transitional system has shrunk by 36 percent, and a further decrease of 2.4 percent in youth unemployment has also been achieved. At the same time, we have recorded a growth in the numbers of people commencing a course of higher education study (38 %) and in the number of graduates (58 %). There has also been a positive development in participation in continuing training, which rose from 44 percent in 2007 to 49 percent in 2012. Even the latest OECD report explicitly emphasises the contribution made by dual VET to the above-average level of education and training of the German population.

The dual system is now considered to be a best practice model for the combating of youth unemployment in Europe. Spain, Portugal, Italy and Greece are all working in conjunction with BIBB to draw up strategies for the reform of their educational systems. Interest in the dual system is equally high outside Europe, as is evidenced by BIBB projects for vocational development and training the trainer in Asia, India and South America.

#### **AND WHAT ABOUT THE FUTURE OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN GERMANY?**

Despite the rosiness of the overall picture, there are no signs of growth within the dual system. Although the image of German vocational education and training across the world has never been better, interest in Germany itself is current declining amongst both school leavers and

companies. In 2012, 33,000 registered training places remained unfilled. Vacancies are particularly prevalent in the hotel and restaurant trade. In the craft trades sector, butchers, bakers, plumbers and industrial cleaners are all bemoaning a lack of applications. Between 1999 and 2011, this was accompanied by a fall of 9.2 percent in the number of companies providing training. It is clear that small companies with up to ten employees are withdrawing from training. And yet it is precisely the small and medium-sized sector and the craft trades that are still considered to form the backbone of German trade and industry. The significance of the recruitment function of the dual system remains high for these companies. Such a set of circumstances is ominous if the rush towards institutes of higher education slowly sucks the life out of the dual training system and leads to an exacerbation of the shortage of skilled workers in SME's and craft trade companies.

### **THE NEED TO ACT IS OBVIOUS**

The focus cannot be on talking down academic education. In the struggle to secure entrants, vocational education and training needs to do more than merely demonstrate its equivalence with the academic system by showing that it is a genuine alternative for the planning and realisation of individual training and employment careers. To this end, more specific instances of implementation are required rather than the reforms that have been developed in droves over the course of the last decade. From an education and training policy point of view, I would like to conclude by highlighting the following.

- Joint endeavours by the Federal Government and federal states to bring about an improvement in the transition from general education to vocational education and training via nationwide implementation of the Educational Chains Initiative or Vocational Orientation Programme
- Improvement in horizontal and vertical permeability in the vocational system and the creation of attractive cross-sectional provision and additional qualifications via the formation of occupational families
- Systematic interlinking of initial and upgrading training via the development of occupational career concepts
- Creation of permeable educational pathways through closer harmonisation of institute of higher education and VET curricula and further promotion of dual courses of higher education study
- Implementation of the European and German Qualifications Framework by including EQF/German Qualifications Framework levels on vocational and academic certificates and

alignment of upgrading training courses regulated by the Federal Government and the chambers to the higher German Qualifications Framework reference levels

- Fostering the internationalisation of vocational education and training by including relevant skills in the normal VET curricula

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