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40 years of BIBB – a glance backward heartens us to look forward

Dear readers,

In 2010, the Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB) looks back on 40 years of engagement for the development and quality of vocational education and training (VET) in Germany. Yet we will not mark this anniversary merely by taking stock of past achievements and resting on our laurels. Considering the challenges we face today and tomorrow, our most important priority is keep our sights trained on the future.

BIBB founded in turbulent times

The German Vocational Training Act (BBiG) came into force on 1 September 1969. In many ways, the law was the upshot of the heated education policy debates kindled by Georg Picht's work on the 'German education catastrophe' ('*Die deutsche Bildungskatastrophe*', 1964) and the ensuing responses, notably the studies by the German Education Council. Whereas company-based apprenticeships had largely been the preserve of industry, the new law brought them inside the public education and training system. The form this took is, it must be said, still widely admired by the international community.

A hallmark of the BBiG was the conviction that the state, employers and trade unions bear joint responsibility for the planning and delivery of vocational education and training. This was reflected as much in the constitution of the Federal Institute for Vocational Training Research (BBF), founded in 1970 under the terms of the BBiG, as it is in BIBB's work today. The most visible elements of the public-private partnership established by the new law were the creation of the Steering Committee (the forerunner of today's Board, then a joint management organ sharing equal standing with the President) and of the Federal Committee for Vocational Training a policy advisory body for the vocational education taking place outside the school system. Back then, the concentration of vocational education research in one federal institute, which maintained direct contact with VET policy and practice through its members, was a first.

But progressive as it was, before long there was a strong sense that opportunities were being missed to take on additional development and support functions.

In the Training Places Promotion Act of 1976, the Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB) was founded as the successor to the BBF and assigned a list of development tasks in addition to VET research.

Wider remit in support of high-quality VET

These tasks ranged from preparing training regulations to implementing pilot projects, compiling the Annual Vocational Training Report and contributing to the work in progress on the collection of VET statistics. These areas marked out the domains on which BIBB's research would concentrate from then onward. The most striking examples were its projects on the supply-and-demand relationship in the apprenticeship-place market, undertaken for the Vocational Training Reports which it was now required to compile annually, and its extensive research in preparation for the modernisation of training regulations in the metalworking and electrical occupations, which paved the way for a fundamental reform of company-based apprenticeships. Since the 1980s, BIBB has also increasingly taken on tasks in the field of international VET cooperation.

The new BBiG of 2005 placed a special emphasis on VET research as part of BIBB's statutory mandate, and as an important foundation for its development, support and advisory tasks. Since then, staff at the Institute – partly in response to the recommendations issued by the German Science Council in autumn 2005 – have undertaken great efforts to assure the high quality of all BIBB's work and to develop this aspect continuously.

Researching – advising – shaping the future

The unique system of public-private partnership has proven its worth many times over. In large part, this explains why BIBB's advisory services are sought after by governments around the world. At the same time, being held in such high esteem imposes certain obligations: true to its mission statement 'Researching – advising – shaping the future', BIBB will continue to work with its partners from research, policy and practice to drive forward the development of the German VET system to meet future needs, always keeping international compatibility in mind. This may have a bearing on the creation of a more efficient transition system, better dovetailing of different training courses, greater competence-orientation, or indeed the qualification of training staff, to name just a few points here. What we bring to the table is nothing less than the knowledge and experience accumulated from 40 years of work. Heartened by looking back, we are ready to rise to these challenges!