

EDITORIAL

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Stirring up a hornet's nest

Dear Readers,

It is easy to call for the bundling of training occupations in occupational groups, and to justify that demand. It is a matter of increasing flexibility for the enterprises providing training and promoting permeability for the graduates. In view of the declining numbers of school leavers, it could also make it easier to maintain the subject class principle.

PATHWAYS TO DESIGNING OCCUPATIONAL GROUPS

Occupational groups are not fundamentally new. They already exist in different manifestations: the metal and electrical trades as well as the construction trades are functioning examples with common core skills. Other occupations and occupational groups are characterized by focal profiles, disciplines or credit-granting options. Many training occupations (about 73% of the total at present), however, although there are connections with related occupations, are still classified as so-called Monoberufe (mono-occupations) – often with very small numbers of trainees. Grouping them together would therefore be a reasonable thing to do. In a structural model for the formation of occupational groups, the BIBB has developed some proposals that are presented in this issue.

A grouping together of mono-occupations into occupational groups would necessarily have implications for the regulatory process. More intensive preliminary research would be absolutely necessary, for example, in order to ascertain what similarities there are, how new occupations are to be integrated into existing structures and how existing occupations may usefully be merged into groups. This, however, requires much greater coordination between industry sectors and partners involved in the procedure. In any case – as the Innovation Circle on Vocational Education and Training (IKBB) has already formulated it – there should be an examination in every new regulatory process of the extent to which there are similarities with existing occupations and how they can be used to form an occupational group. This should be explicitly made a subject of the application discussions.

FRICTION REGARDING IMPLEMENTATION

From the technical point of view, many occupations could be grouped together, since they would have enough content in common. The question is, however, to what extent the relevant industry sectors would be willing to cooperate. After all, occupations are not designed on the drawing board; they arise from the needs of practice and in communication with practitioners.

Implementation difficulties arise on the one hand from the specificities of the occupations and their characteristic features. These make it difficult sometimes to combine them with other occupations. On the other hand, however, difficulties are also presented by the specific interests of enterprises and their associations. It is important for one's self-image to have one's "own" industry-specific occupation, and this is also a criterion of demarcation from other industry sectors. The creation of new and often industry-specific occupations has also helped in recent years to open up additional training capacity in the growing services sector. Having one's own trade is a signal of commitment to the young, it means a competitive advantage and sometimes it protects the industry from unwanted competition, because in that way the industry lays claim to skilled occupational tasks.

The occupational structures therefore to a large extent reflect the industry structures and thus the industry-specific parts of labour markets. Economists speak of "lock-in effects" in this context. They ensure unique features and specific occupational qualification, but at the same time they limit permeability with other industries. Anyone who encroaches on these domains or calls them into question can therefore expect violent resistance on the part of those concerned. Vocational education and training policy-makers cannot close their eyes to this fact. But they must not strike their sails from the outset on that account and capitulate in the face of the resistance of vested interests. This just makes it all the more important to identify similarities and differences between the occupations through stepped-up vocational research. The results could help place occupational orientation on an objective basis.

Translation: Paul David Doherty, Global Sprachteam Berlin