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EDITORIAL

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Continuing education remains a priority for the future!

Dear readers,

A number of commentators think that Germany is a nation of slouches when it comes to continuing education. International studies also do much to lend this theory a certain plausibility. However, it is fundamentally problematic to compare country-specific continuing education reports because different countries' education systems can differ quite considerably. Setting this problem aside, the truth is that Germany's position is towards the middle of the rankings. Our country has no need to hide from these comparisons. With 20,000 continuing education providers offering 500,000 products in total, our country has a complex and diversified continuing education structure which complements the high-quality initial vocational training system and plays a key part in guaranteeing that German industry can constantly maintain its high standing in global competition. Education is indisputably our country's most crucial resource, which means that continuing education remains a priority for the future!

The most significant determinants of participation in continuing education are time and money, accessibility, the suitability and transparency of the training provision on offer, the individual aptitude for continuing education and a customer-oriented guidance system. All these factors influence the individual's need for continuing education and act as the mainspring for the take-up of continuing education activities! Bearing these conditioning factors in mind, we must set our sights particularly on the following points:

DOING MORE TO INTEGRATE INITIAL AND CONTINUING VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

There is a particular need to join up the curricula of initial vocational training and upgrading training in order to avoid gaps in learning and foster lifelong learning. Every initial vocational qualification must provide a gateway into continuing vocational education and training. To facilitate a personalised approach to continuing education planning, modular and cumulative forms of continuing education gain particular significance. Occupations must be framed more broadly in regulatory policy and in curricular terms, so as to align them with career-oriented concepts of

occupational progression. This finds expression in the integration of initial and continuing education requirements in occupational profiles.

REMOVING BARRIERS TO ACCESS TO CONTINUING EDUCATION

Adequate numbers of vocational as well as academic continuing education opportunities must be tailored to address the specific concerns of working people. In part, this means offering specific preparatory provision on a nationwide basis, to promote academic learning skills for those with vocational qualifications who wish to progress to university. Barriers to entry such as bureaucratic constraints, awkward course times, non-transparent provision or geographical distance must not be allowed to stand in the way of the continuing education needs of individuals. Continuing education providers must therefore understand their role as education service providers and adapt their provision in a customer-oriented manner.

IMPROVING THE MECHANISMS FOR AWARDING CREDIT FOR PRIOR VOCATIONAL COMPETENCE TOWARDS UNIVERSITY STUDIES

Actors from higher education and vocational education are called upon to work jointly to develop appropriate credit transfer models for upgrading training in the vocational sector, and to make credit transfer mechanisms transparent. In order to improve the compatibility, and hence the scope for credit transfer, between vocational and higher education courses, they should be coordinated – more closely than in the past - from the course-development stage onward. Joint curriculum development opens up opportunities for the expansion of coherent and compatible forms of provision.

PROMOTING CONTINUING EDUCATION OF OLDER PEOPLE

The raising of the pension age creates a growing necessity to maintain working people's interest in appropriate employment. Continuing education plays an overriding role in the attainment of this goal. Where circumstances require changes in personal occupational status, such as a health-related change of duties, continuing education is a way of introducing this in advance and making it acceptable to the individual. In this scenario, particular specialisations within occupational groups or job families can also provide a workable structural framework for matching qualification options to relevant occupations when a change in duties can be anticipated; continuing education enabling a roofer to become a customer adviser, for example.