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## **Beckoned onward by a new day!**

Dear readers,

The agreement concluded on 31 January 2012 between the Federal Government, the German Länder and industrial and social partners on the introduction of the German national qualifications framework (*Deutscher Qualifikationsrahmen*, DQR) is an important milestone for vocational education and training in Germany.

Since the levels of the DQR map across to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) that is already in force, a structure is now in place for linking up the German vocational education system with the whole European Education Area. Standardised qualification levels in Europe will ensure greater transparency and thereby foster transnational mobility.

Moreover, the DQR that is now valid for the German education system codifies for the first time what was previously more an affirmation of faith than a regulatory fact in Germany: the equivalence of vocational and general education and the relevance of permeability between them for optimal access to educational and qualification pathways in future.

The national qualifications framework now offers a systematic classification grid of the expected standards at each level of occupational competence. Hence the DQR can aptly be consulted as a template for the further development of the vocational education and training system. And one aspect of particular note is this: it is a binding framework for the education system as a whole, and future developments of all subsystems of our education system have to be aligned with it!

The main imperative for the DQR, speaking particularly from the perspective of vocational education policy, is to highlight important transition points into higher education. At last, binding common criteria exist for qualification levels across both the vocational and the higher education sectors. What is more, the DQR reflects an educational objective that is common to both sectors: competence that translates into professional effectiveness. So the essential structural conditions are now established for systematically promoting better permeability between the subsystems of the German education system.

Of course, whether we succeed in implementing all these aspects still remains to be seen, but nevertheless, the foundations are now laid for better coordination between vocational and academic curricula. And if in the near future we see Master Craftsman qualifications on the same level as university Bachelor's degrees, then ultimately we have taken a decisive step towards greater equivalence between academic and vocational education. That will make it easier to communicate the high status of top-level vocational qualifications and so advance the reputation of the vocational education and training system.

Therefore, work on the implementation of the DQR must now be pursued with great vigour. On the one hand, this involves fulfilling all prerequisites for the inclusion of DQR and EQF levels on all vocational certificates awarded – before the end of this year, if possible. Vocational education experts currently assume that sub-statutory regulations will be sufficient, in the first instance,

without any need for complex procedures or even law reforms. On the other hand, stakeholders both inside and outside the vocational education system must gain greater familiarity with EQF and DQR issues so that the underlying philosophy of the qualifications frameworks, i. e. competence-orientation at all levels of the system from regulatory policy to educational practice, is actively put into practice.

For the same reason, the editorial team of BWP will devote a special section to issues arising from the implementation of the qualifications framework, starting with the forthcoming issue (BWP 3/2012). Under the heading “DQR in practice” (*DQR konkret*), future issues of the journal will take up specific lines of inquiry; for example, what consequences the introduction of the DQR will have for the updating of training regulations or the ongoing development of recognition procedures for competences acquired through prior informal and non-formal learning. It is plain to see that the theme of the DQR opens up perspectives throughout the education system and beyond. “A new day beckons on to newer shores”, in the words of Goethe’s Faust. We eagerly anticipate developments!

Translation: Deborah Shannon, Academic Text and Translation, Norwich