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EDITORIAL

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### **Vocational education and training policy challenges for the new legislative period**

Dear readers,

There is broad consensus on the priorities in vocational education and training policy for the new legislative period. The demographic trend and how to meet the demand for skilled workers will continue to be the key challenges in the next few years. The community is also generally in agreement that imbalances in the apprenticeship-place market must be remedied; more must be done to improve permeability; and the tasks involved in implementing the German Qualifications Framework must be pursued with particular priority. Above and beyond these challenges, in the view of the Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB), prominence should be given to the following themes, on each of which some direct action is necessary:

**Expanding vocational education research:** Good vocational education and training policy relies on an equally good knowledge basis! High-quality research into vocational education, and especially as it relates to research into general education, must be given considerably more recognition within the German research policy framework. Targeted advancement of doctoral researchers and the expansion of relevant research networks are conspicuous by their absence in the field of vocational education and training. Likewise, many urgent research tasks at universities and in research establishments cannot be tackled due to the inadequacy of current resourcing. What is therefore required is a programme to support and expand vocational education and training research – not least so that real justice is done to the outstanding priority of vocational education and training for the German economy and society!

**Ensuring that inter-company training centres are sustainable:** The Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) and the Ministry of Economics and Technology (BMWi) have

been supporting around 1,000 intercompany training centres since 1973. Looking forward, their importance in maintaining high quality in initial and continuing vocational education and training will grow rather than decline. Various aspects are beginning to require major reorganisation, however, in specific response to the demographic trend. Appropriate strategies are called for to concentrate the infrastructure along the lines of a sustainable and demand-oriented nationwide network. To this end, the past level of resourcing must be kept up for the financial years ahead!

**Continuing to organise hands-on vocational orientation:** Successful implementation of the Federal Government's vocational orientation programme makes it clear that hands-on vocational orientation at an early opportunity helps to build young people's career-choice skills and enhances their maturity to embark on initial vocational training. Only this approach lives up to the principle that prevention is better than cure! So far, around 600,000 school pupils have passed through this programme. In order to implement this approach sustainably and throughout the German education system nationwide, the German government and the Länder must reach agreement that long-term expansion of the programme across the board and offers for all school pupils at lower secondary level I can be guaranteed.

**Extending the internationalisation of vocational education and training:** There is growing worldwide interest in the adoption of dual-system elements. Demand of this nature comes not only from foreign governments or institutions but increasingly also from German companies abroad. The associated dynamism underscores the growing importance of international networking and cooperation in vocational education and training. Moreover, the recognition of qualifications acquired abroad is developing into an important approach for tackling the expected skills shortage in Germany. In supporting the establishment of the Central Office for International Vocational Education and Training Cooperation, funded by the BMBF, and by providing services through the "Recognition in Germany" portal, BIBB is supporting the internationalisation efforts mentioned. In order to continue this process, firstly, steps must be taken to ensure that the setting up of the Central Office can be completed over three years, according to plan, in the new legislative period. Secondly, support is required for the efforts already in progress to consolidate the recognition portal and to work towards lasting implementation of the Recognition Act!