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EDITORIAL

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## **Professionalisation through non-formal learning**

Dear readers,

The quality of initial vocational education and training (IVET) stands and falls by the work of the training staff, their level of qualification, and their commitment to training the next generation of skilled employees. Around 700,000 trainers are registered with the competent bodies which oversee dual-system vocational training in Germany, and this figure is further swelled by vocational school teachers and by trainers and coaches in continuing vocational education and training (CVET). It is by no means unrealistic to estimate that Germany has 1.5 million individuals in total working full-time or part-time in IVET and CVET.

### **Different roles – differentiated requirements**

The workload of vocational education and training practitioners has become far more diversified over the years. The core activity of IVET, i.e. the concrete specialist instruction of apprentices, must now take its place among other administrative and management tasks, consulting and media-resources development, coordination and networking, social pedagogy and career guidance. Some trainers also work as examiners for the IVET and CVET examinations administered by the competent bodies.

The formal training of vocational trainers may consist of a university degree, or a preparation course for the trainer aptitude examination, or a continuing education programme in conjunction with employment. While all these qualifications lay a foundation, they are not sufficient to cover the full breadth of today's differentiated requirements. It is the non-formal acquisition of further competence through self-organised, experience-based learning that makes the decisive difference. There is now less demand for standard products, and much more for individual solutions which are well-matched to the interests and needs of the learners in question, and the time they have at their disposal. More than anything, this necessitates adequate time for reflection and discussion with others. But often, the conditions in which trainers work allow very little scope for this aspect. A lot is left to individual initiative. Support is called for from chambers and associations, from organisations representing the different occupations, and from employers and contract-awarding bodies.

### **Skilled workers as part-time instructors – the real trainers**

Nowadays the actual trainers in companies are the part-time instructors, i. e. staff with skilled worker, journeyman and clerk qualifications who take on additional training

responsibilities. They supervise apprentices, assign them tasks, instruct them, give them feedback, and support them if problems arise. They largely equip themselves for the instructor role by “learning by doing”, perhaps supported by private study, by sharing experience with colleagues, or more rarely, by taking seminars in industrial education.

In educational terms, this is far from ideal. Nevertheless, most trainers clearly perform their task extremely well. The examination results speak for themselves. Over 90 percent of candidates pass vocational qualification examinations at the first attempt. This very strongly indicates that companies entrust IVET tasks primarily to well-qualified and experienced skilled staff, and that the latter tend to provide training input regularly rather than just sporadically.

However, the challenge still to be faced is how to support this group in its work, and how to equip it with the right tools. The Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB) is working on this and contributes, for example, by publishing occupation-specific implementation guides (“Structuring Training”), maintaining Internet portals (like “foraus.de”), initiating pilot projects and disseminating good IVET teaching practice.

Translation: Deborah Shannon, Academic Text and Translation, Norwich