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EDITORIAL

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Building bridges together

Dear readers,

Many emerging economies and developing countries are faced with the task of creating vocational training and employment opportunities for their growing populations. Often there is also a grave imbalance between the low skills of job-seekers, whose vocational qualifications are rarely practice-based, and rising demand for fully qualified skilled workers. This is a common complaint of German companies who establish branches abroad and recruit staff locally. In locations abroad, the “made in Germany” quality promise cannot be underwritten by the knowledge taught on school-based courses alone. German companies therefore offer training programmes aligned to the German occupational profiles to their new staff in their overseas establishments; to deliver these programmes they need in-situ support.

CENTRAL OFFICE FOR INTERNATIONAL VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING COOPERATION

The dual model of initial vocational training is acknowledged worldwide as a model of good practice because it ensures that a large proportion of young people gain skills through vocational training oriented to the needs of industry. The German government has responded to the growing number of enquiries from other countries by adopting a strategy for international vocational education and training cooperation in July. That document contains a declaration of support for the implementation of reforms in Germany’s partner countries.

The various approaches and initiatives of the individual departments are coordinated via a round table, which consists of representatives from government departments and from the chambers and the social partners, among other bodies. BIBB has an important function to perform within these structures. It has been commissioned to establish a Central Office for International Vocational Education and Training Cooperation, which commenced its work in

September. Its purpose is to help improve the positioning of German vocational education and training at international level.

To accomplish this aim, the Central Office will organise an exchange of experience on vocational education and training in Germany and on reforms of vocational education in other countries. It will also support cooperation projects as well as education and training stakeholders and institutions. Pilot projects will be initiated and monitored to demonstrate best practices and innovative approaches. During the launch phase, its priority is to support reform processes in European countries with high youth unemployment. Generally, however, the policy will be to support cooperation with other countries, especially those with existing cooperation agreements. More information on the tasks of the Central Office is given in the article by BIRGIT THOMANN and MICHAEL WIECHERT in this issue.

INVOLVEMENT OF STAKEHOLDERS

It is absolutely clear that the German dual system as a whole cannot simply be transplanted; at best, individual elements of the German system are transferable to other countries, given their vastly different background conditions, structures of vocational education and training, and underlying traditions, attitudes and norms. For example, it makes no sense simply to translate the German occupational profiles if there are no training staff on hand to implement the qualifications, or if the culture of learning is dominated by imitation and rote-learning rather than autonomous learning.

More thorough involvement of companies and employers must be the core of any reform. The dual approach goes significantly further than providing work placements for vocational-school learners. The great challenge is to motivate companies to assume responsibility for the skilled and systematic training of young people; in times of economic crisis, this will be no mean feat. Resistance within the schools gives rise to a challenge of a different nature: schools and teacher organisations fear the erosion of their status if elements of training are shifted into the workplace, not least because it might result in job cuts. All experience shows that reforms take patience and perseverance. Efforts should therefore focus on developing and testing adapted models, involving all the relevant stakeholders, and establishing learning partnerships.

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