



Bundesministerium
für Bildung
und Forschung

**Introductory Statement
by the
Parliamentary State Secretary
to the Federal Minister of Education and Research**

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**on the topic of
"Parity of Esteem and Quality"
(Session 2.1)**

**on the occasion of the
Informal OECD Education Ministers Meeting**

**in Copenhagen
on 22/23 January 2007**

It pleases me to see that the issue of vocational education and training is gaining in importance within the OECD and is expressly cited as a main area of focus in the OECD Work Programme. Today's ministerial meeting provides a vital platform on which to exchange information on reforms and strategies that will enhance the status, quality and attractiveness of vocational education and training. I also believe the meeting can provide impetus when deciding which areas the OECD should focus on in its vocational education and training activities.

Let me first of all say a few words about national developments in Germany before addressing the topic 'Parity of Esteem and Quality'.

I.

Germany operates a dual vocational education and training system which largely takes account of the demands. We believe this model, which combines practical training in the workplace with school education, has shown itself to be an ongoing success. This is confirmed by the high demand among school-leavers each year for vocational education and training under the dual system, and by the high numbers of trainees and apprentices who experience a smooth transition into the job markets.

But even this dual system provides no safeguard against the economic, demographic and technological challenges of today.

Thus, with the National Vocational Education and Training Pact, the coalition government has begun its reform of the dual system. In the short term, we – together with the industry associations – aim to boost the number of job training places and apprenticeships. In the current training year alone, some five percent more job training and apprenticeship places have been created compared with the previous year.

Looking to the medium and longer term, we are preparing structural reforms which concentrate on three key areas:

1. Testing of vocational education and training modules that can be credited towards either initial vocational education and training or further education and training. The aim is to enhance access to the dual system for specific groups, particularly those who leave vocational education and training prematurely and those who apply for it long after leaving school. Another aim is better linkage between initial vocational education and training and further education and training. Further training during the entire period of gainful employment will in future be an absolute must.
2. Improving permeability between vocational education and training and higher education.

3. International recognition and classification of the dual system.

We aim to develop a National Qualifications Framework to coincide with the introduction of the European Qualifications Framework. The steering group for the German Qualifications Framework of the Federal Government and the *Länder* started to work this week. We are confident that the European Parliament will adopt the European Qualifications Framework before the end of this year.

II.

As a lead-in to the subject of 'parity of esteem and quality', the topic we are about to discuss, I should like to concentrate on just a few thoughts and issues that I believe have a direct link with the objective of effecting parity in vocational education and training.

Parity between vocational education and training and other education sectors has been called for many decades. But many education systems are still only paying what amounts to lip service to the cause. Criticising this situation has become something of a recurring ritual. To alter it, we not only need other education sectors to change their attitudes towards vocational education and training, we need changes in vocational education and training itself.

1. We should ensure that the vocational qualifications awarded – especially in state-regulated initial vocational education and training – are both of relevance to and accepted by industry and employers.

2. We should establish mechanisms and early warning systems that foster high levels of innovation in the vocational education and training sector, allow it to adapt to technological advancement and provide for foreseeable demands as regards training and qualifications. In the past ten years, three fourths of the approximately 350 occupations in Germany were modernised or newly created.

3. We should systematically connect our vocational education and training systems with other education systems where they interface (permeability). And we should establish the best possible training and advancement opportunities within the vocational education and training system itself. Young people must be supported in their decisions concerning vocational education and training. To give them that support, we must avoid cul-de-sac education and provide meaningful opportunities for upward mobility. In particular access to higher education must be made easier for those who have completed training in the dual system. This includes the possibility of transferring vocational training credits.

4. We should enhance the quality and quality assurance systems of education providers, of teaching content and of teachers and trainers. This calls for reliable evaluation, optimisation and monitoring processes. And it also calls for organisational reform to foster self-monitoring among education providers and boost competition.

5. We should respect and strengthen the special role of the social partners in vocational education and training. They are not only vital when it comes to taking up those leaving initial vocational education and training. They are increasingly responsible for providing training itself. This makes them a key component in the success of the vocational education and training system and the careers of those they train.

We are, of course, aware that Germany's dual system has been in place a long time and is perhaps not altogether suited as a model for transfer to other countries. Nonetheless, we are delighted to see the dual system experience something of an international renaissance, with more and more EU and OECD countries taking up vocational education and training models that focus on the needs of industry. At the Athens Meeting in 2006, we created the conditions to allow us to discuss national reforms with these countries on a regular basis and for European and international committees to agree common positions on vocational education and training.