

# Vocational Education and Training in Germany

## Strengths, Challenges and Recommendations

### STRENGTHS

- Vocational education and training is deeply embedded and widely respected in German society. The system offers qualifications in a broad spectrum of professions and flexibly adapts to the changing needs of the labour market.
- The dual system is especially well-developed in Germany, integrating work-based and school-based learning to prepare apprentices for a successful transition to full-time employment.
- A major strength of the dual system is the high degree of engagement and ownership on the part of employers and other social partners. But the system is also characterised by an intricate web of checks and balances at the national, state, municipal, and company levels that ensures that the short-term needs of employers do not distort broader educational and economic goals.
- The VET system as a whole is well-resourced, combining public and private funding. Germany has maintained strong financial support and maintained the apprenticeship offer for the VET system even during the crisis.
- Germany has a well-developed and institutionalised VET research capacity, including the Federal Institute for VET, (BIBB), and a national network of research centres that study different aspects of the system to support continuous innovation and improvement in the VET system.

### CHALLENGES

- The transition system, now serving nearly as many young people as the dual system, suffers from undue fragmentation and an absence of transparency. Despite the very substantial resources devoted to the system, too few programme participants make a successful transition into the regular VET system.
- Career guidance seems highly variable across the *Länder*, with no single agency responsible for assuring delivery of quality information and guidance services to all students.
- Some students leave compulsory school with weak core academic skills. The VET system is not currently organised to ascertain whether this is in fact a problem or, if so, to address it.
- The evaluation of dual system students at the end of their apprenticeship is dominated by the Chamber exam. Because their school performance does not count in the Chamber exam, students may not take their schooling seriously, thereby limiting their ability to participate successfully in some form of tertiary education.
- Although Germany has recently opened more pathways from upper-secondary VET to tertiary education, to date very few VET graduates have made use of those pathways.
- Shrinking cohort numbers due to demographic decline is providing an important contextual challenge.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Create a coordinating committee for the transition system within each Land to improve co-operation between stakeholders and make transition offers more transparent. Evaluate the cost-effectiveness of individual transition measures and roll out the most promising initiatives to the whole country.
2. Reform the career guidance system to deliver well-informed guidance to all. Fix lead responsibility for career information and guidance in a single governmental agency. In the longer run, consider structural reform of the dual system to facilitate effective career choice.
3. Assess the literacy and numeracy skills of all students entering the transition system, and those entering apprenticeships without a school leaving certificate from a Realschule or Gymnasium. Provide explicit basic skills instruction for those in need of remediation. Place greater priority on general education and broad academic skill development in the part-time vocational schools.

4. Make inclusion of the school mark in the final certificate mandatory and include an explicit assessment of literacy and numeracy skills in the final school exam. In the longer run, merge the Chamber exam and the school exam into a single final assessment. Strengthen collaboration between schools and employers through an integrated assessment process.
5. Open access to tertiary education further and address transition barriers perceived by students. Design adequate guidance, induction and financial support measures for less academically trained people wanting to attend university. Promote dual universities and dual programmes at regular universities and encourage more flexible, part-time university offers and the recognition of prior learning and experience.

## FURTHER READING

Vocational education and training (VET) has a key economic function in up-skilling and integrating young people into the labour market and in providing high quality technical skills. But in recent decades, VET has been a neglected part of initial education: education policy research and reform have tended to focus primarily on school and tertiary education.

The OECD's policy review of vocational education and training (VET), *Learning for Jobs*, comprises a programme of analytical work and individual country reviews and is designed to help countries make their VET systems more responsive to labour market needs.

[Learning for Jobs, OECD Reviews of Vocational Education and Training Policies, Germany \(OECD, 2010\)](#) was released in September 2010 and assesses the main challenges faced by the VET system and presents an interconnected package of five policy recommendations. For each recommendation, the report describes the challenge, the recommendation itself, supporting arguments, and issues of implementation.

Further information about the policy review and reports on VET systems in other countries is available on the OECD website [www.oecd.org/edu/learningforjobs](http://www.oecd.org/edu/learningforjobs)