

Germany's dual vocational training system

The Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy wants to provide information, insights and ideas on the dual system of vocational training in order to help interested countries develop national solutions. It should be noted that much of the success that the dual vocational training system has had in Germany and also in countries such as Switzerland, Austria and Denmark stems from the fact that it has long had a firm place in these countries. The system is widely accepted throughout society and there is strong consensus between the various stakeholders, all of whom participate in the Alliance for Initial and Further Training, a body set up under the leadership of the Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy.

1. A combination of practical and classroom-based training

The dual vocational training system is based upon a combination of on-the-job training within a specific company, and classroom based training provided by a vocational school. Apprentices spend three to four days a week at the company providing their practical training and one or two days a week in the classroom, where they will acquire additional, more theoretical knowledge needed for their chosen profession.

Specialists within the company provide the bulk of “on-the-job” training. They make sure that apprentices, once they have completed their training, will be able to discharge their duties without supervision.

2. Standardised course content and examinations across the whole of Germany

The on-the-job training is governed by training regulations that set out uniform, nation-wide standards for training content, the training timetable, and examinations.

Practitioners are also heavily involved in the development of curricula and the setting of examinations. This means that the curricula are set in cooperation between all of the stakeholders, which guarantees that companies and employees alike will accept them. The same standards apply across the whole of Germany and qualifications are recognised throughout the country. This makes these a valuable quality benchmark for employers recruiting new staff and makes it easier for employees to find a new job. Thanks to the broad-based training they receive for their

chosen profession, employees trained under the dual system are not tied to a particular employer or region.

3. Continuous updating of the training in response to technical advances and changing business practices

The various curricula are continuously updated to ensure that they keep up with the state-of-the-art in technology and with new developments. New professions are being created as necessary. Companies benefit from being able to recruit employees that have been trained to the latest state-of-the-art and can therefore help foster innovation and competitiveness. There are vocational training qualifications for professions in all industries and for the public administration; depending on the breadth and depth of the course content, courses take between two and three-and-a-half years to complete.

4. Collaboration between employers and trade unions

The push for new professions to be introduced or existing ones to be modified usually comes for the employers' associations. Once all the parties involved – especially the trade unions – have been heard, the competent minister (in most cases the Federal Minister for Economic Affairs and Energy) coordinates with the Länder, which have jurisdiction over the vocational schools, and decides whether or not the initiative is to be implemented. Where this is so, the new curriculum is then drawn up in cooperation between experts representing the employers and the unions respectively, a procedure which ensures that developments in vocational qualifications meet the needs of business.

5. Co-ordination of the contents of on-the-job training and the classroom-based training

Whenever a qualification is modernised or created, the curriculum taught at the vocational schools is revised accordingly. The theoretical elements to be taught are selected so that they match the practical content that is being taught at any particular stage of the training. This ensures that the practical and educational training dovetail.

Local companies cooperate with the vocational school responsible for their apprentices, thereby ensuring that the

training programme works in the best way possible for them and the region (e.g. they coordinate on whether the classroom-based training is to take place two days a week or in alternating weeks). This is a key aspect of quality assurance.

6. Cross-company courses to supplement training provided by individual companies

Some companies are too specialised to be able to deliver all of the training content stipulated in the training regulations. In such cases, apprentices are entitled to extra training to cover the rest of the course content. This enables more companies to offer training and boosts the number of training places. The extra training courses also ensure that the training keeps up pace with new developments in technology and business, balances out regional differences, and ensures a uniform, high standard of training.

The Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy provides funding for cross-company courses for the skilled-crafts professions.

7. Training the instructors

Anyone wishing to work as an instructor must demonstrate the relevant specialist knowledge and personal aptitude required for this profession by law. This requires them to sit a specialised examination testing both their professional and teaching skills. These requirements not only guarantee that the content of the training course is taught correctly, but also that courses are planned and

conducted in line with legal requirements and using teaching methods that correspond to apprentices' needs.

8. Chambers ensuring that companies remain able to provide vocational training

The self-regulatory bodies (the chambers) advise the companies providing training, monitor the training given, determine the suitability of companies and instructors, register training contracts and conduct nationwide examinations. These measures ensure those awarded qualifications have been trained to a high standard.

9. Alliance for Initial and Further Training 2015 - 2018

At the end of 2014, the Federal Government, the Federal Employment Agency, commerce, the trade unions and the Länder entered into a Alliance for Initial and Further Training for 2015-2018. Their shared aim has been to strengthen dual vocational training and to promote the notion of vocational education being just as valuable as academic education. The objective here is to convince more young people from Germany and from among the refugees who have fled to Germany to train for one of the more than 300 professions for which vocational training is available. In this way, and through its work, the Alliance for Initial and Further Training is helping to close the skills gap in Germany.

For more information, please visit www.aus-und-weiterbildungsallianz.de.