

**Prof. Dr. Friedrich Hubert Esser**

**President, Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training  
(Bundesinstitut für Berufsbildung, BIBB)**

**In your opinion, what are the key factors that have led to the success of the German vocational education and training system?**

The following aspects should be mentioned as particular assets of the German vocational education and training system:

- The close degree of cooperation between the state and trade and industry generally and the strong position of the social partners and chamber organisations in VET policy in particular;
- Learning within the real work process in conjunction with a close interlinking of theory-based learning at vocational schools and practically-oriented training in the company;
- The high level of societal acceptance of nationally standardized regulations for vocational education and training and the applicable standards these include;
- The quality of training staff in companies and at vocational schools;
- The “communication between academic research, policy and practice” which is institutionalized at BIBB, which enjoys high recognition nationwide, and which forms the basis for the harmonious three-pronged vocational education and training (VET) approach consisting of research, development and guidance.

This combination of benefits constitutes the “unique selling points” of the German system. There are, however, two additional aspects that are important to me. Firstly, dual vocational education and training is overwhelmingly financed by private sector trade and industry. This is connected with an indication that such investments are economically worthwhile for the companies providing training, and is also linked in with the fact that Germany has a low rate of youth unemployment in international comparative terms of around 8%, as opposed to a European average of approximately 22%. In Spain and Greece, about one in two young people under the age of 25 is unemployed. This shows how successful our system is. We provide young people with practically related training which is tailored to the needs of the

economy. Interest from abroad in dual vocational education and training in Germany has been constantly increasing for a number of years. This means that there is every justification in describing the system as a successful model.

**From your experience, what effect has workforce training had on the development of Germany's economy and to what extent could this knowledge be applied to the U.S. market?**

Quality-assured institutionalized dual vocational education and training and ongoing continuing vocational training secure the innovative ability and competitiveness of German trade and industry while also supporting individual employability and work satisfaction. Dual initial and continuing training, and the skilled workers which such a system produces, are the foundations of the German economy and a guarantee for the quality of products which are "Made in Germany" and therefore of particular importance to an export nation such as Germany. In addition to this, advanced vocational training offers people prospects for professional careers and makes the vocational education and training system even more attractive. Advanced vocational training assists in personal development and the professionalization of planning and decision-making ability as well as broadening employability skills. Many countries in which vocational education and training tends to be organized along full-time school-based lines are now introducing elements of the system in Germany in order to reform their VET. The EU Commission, for example, recently proposed that countries with high rates of youth unemployment should seek to counter this problem by placing more emphasis on elements of dual vocational education and training. In the USA, reports we have received from locally based German corporate representatives indicate that interest in dual initial and continuing VET is also growing. We are perfectly justified in speaking of an "export hit" in this regard! From a system perspective, it is important to us that the individual firms on the ground continue to focus on cross-cutting solutions which extend beyond the individual company rather than merely implementing tailored stand-alone responses.

**Where do you see the future of the vocational system in Germany? Do you envision a closer connection between vocational training and the higher education system?**

Our aim is an integrated educational system in which vocational education and training and higher education enjoy equality / equal regard and are interwoven with each other in a

permeable manner, one in which people are able to receive credit transfers for the competences they have acquired to move from one area to the other. This requires transparency and trust from the respective educational area. The agreement for the introduction of the German Qualifications Framework, which was concluded at the end of January between the Federal Government, the federal states and trade and industry, represents an important VET milestone in this regard. This is the first time that we have had clear documentation in writing that vocational qualifications such as master craftsmen qualifications in craft trades are on the same equivalent reference level as Bachelor degrees awarded by institutes of higher education. This has lent considerable esteem to vocational education and training in Germany and also sends out a signal to young people. Pursuing vocational education and training does not close the door to opportunity in any way. In precisely the same way as academic education, it leads to the highest levels of competence. This is also an important message to the international community due to the fact that a poor image is frequently attached to vocational education and training in many countries.

### **What kinds of structural developments are necessary in order to adjust to a rapidly changing global manufacturing/technological environment?**

Increasing internationalization and globalization are setting new benchmarks for trade and industry, for society and, of course, also for vocational education and training. The requirements stipulated today with regard to the contents of occupations are considerably higher than was previously the case. This means that both dual VET and career-oriented continuing training need to display connectivity with international developments. Greater transparency and comparability of learning achievements are required here. For this purpose, we need to align ourselves to standards which are not tied to qualifications and learning venues. What is required is a paradigm shift away from input orientation towards an outcomes-based approach which places the main focus on the competences of individuals. The curricula also need to be structured in a competence-based way in the future and more closely interlinked with higher education wherever possible. Work is currently ongoing at BIBB on a competence-oriented realignment of vocational education and training, and we are also developing and piloting a concept which will serve as the basis for enabling further improvement of the international connectivity of German VET qualifications.

Specific competences which are becoming necessary as a result of increasing international links will also need to play an outstanding part in terms of content structure: competence in

foreign languages, knowledge of the partner countries of the respective company, intercultural competence and the promotion of mobility.

**What instruments has Germany's Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training implemented in order to build and ensure a qualified skilled workforce, and which of these instruments have proven most effective?**

As a recognized center of competence for the research and further development of initial and continuing vocational education and training in Germany, the Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training identifies the future tasks facing the sector. It promotes innovations in both national and international VET and develops new practically oriented proposed solutions. The main focus is on securing and modernizing initial and continuing vocational education and training. The important instruments which BIBB deploys in this regard are:

- VET research and reporting;
- Data or evidence-based guidance for policymakers and government;
- Updating or modernisation of initial and advanced training occupations, including nationally recognized examination standards working in close conjunction with the Federal Government, the federal states, and social partners;
- The implementation of development projects and pilot schemes for the further development of the VET system and
- The practical support of training staff via relevant information and guidance provision.