

Dual Vocational Training

Duale Berufsausbildung

Herausgeber und Copyright DIHK - Deutscher Industrie- und Handelskammertag
-Postanschrift: 11052 Berlin
Besucheranschrift: Breite Straße 29 | Berlin-Mitte
Telefon (030) 20 308-0 | Telefax (030) 20 308-1000
Internet: www.ihk.de

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Vocational Training in Germany

– The Dual System –

Vocational training in the Federal Republic of Germany is provided on the job and in vocational training schools. Based on what is referred to as the dual system, practical vocational training is given at work, backed up by theoretical training and general education provided in vocational training schools which are generally attended on one or two days a week.

The characteristic feature of this system is that the provision of knowledge and skills is linked to the acquisition of the required job experience. This ensures that training will proceed under the same conditions that the trainee will encounter when practising his chosen occupation. Only on the job will a trainee be able to learn to cope with the constantly changing demands of the job and to appreciate the variety of social relationships that exist in the field of labour. In addition, learning by doing will give a sense of achievement and provide a special source of motivation for the trainee. It promotes independence and a sense of responsibility, which are indispensable qualities in a developed industrial country, because by tackling concrete tasks under true working conditions the trainee can give evidence of the knowledge and skills he has acquired and can himself experience the success of his efforts. This shows that training on the job is more than just a process of institutionalized and organized learning.

The Vocational Training Act

The importance of plants for training is reflected in the fact that standards and rules for this kind of training were set up by the self-governing economic bodies, i. e. mainly by the Chambers of Industry and Commerce. It was not until 1969 that a Vocational Training Act was passed by the German parliament that brought together the few relevant regulations contained in other legislation and gave the force of law to much that had until then been regulated by the statutes of the Chambers of Industry and Commerce. The Act made no alteration in the training system itself. In the year 2005, this Act was comprehensively amended.

The Vocational Training Act regulates not only the training of young persons after their period of compulsory school attendance. As determined in the Act, the concept of vocational training comprises initial training, further training and vocational retraining. In conformity with the powers of jurisdiction laid down in the German Constitution, the Vocational Training Act does not apply to vocational training schools, for which the constituent states of the Federal Republic (the „Laender“) are responsible. The form of German vocational training, with its basis of learning by doing and with the training employers as its central element, meant that the regulations governing it could not be taken from education law alone. There is also a very extensive labour law component. For instance, the relationship between employer and trainee is based on a civil law training contract which is subject to the legal principles and provisions governing contracts of employment, provided there are no other provisions to the contrary. The consequence of this is general freedom to contract. The employer can decide whether he wishes to take on trainees and with whom he concludes a training contract. The same applies to the young persons. Neither for employers nor for young persons is there an obligation to train. Nor are young persons directed into specific occupations: the labour offices merely give vocational advice and help to find training places for prospective trainees.

Training and Labour Market

With this system there is a direct link between training capacity and the demand for skilled labour. There is no call for state planning, nor even for regional or nationwide planning. The decisions taken by individual companies as to their trainee requirements make up both the aggregate demand and the aggregate supply of trainee vacancies. Thus the aggravating consequences of misdirected planning are avoided. There is in addition a constant exchange between training and non-training companies, so that any necessary adjustment of individual company decisions is effected via the labour market. One can hardly think of a more effective coordination of the systems of training and employment. Such close integration of training in the companies concerned will obviously have implications for the funding of training, which is effected by the companies themselves. In other words, expenditure on training is operating expenditure, and is thus reflected in costing.

The Process of Training

While any company is free to decide whether or not to take on trainees, the process of training itself is of course governed by certain rules. This is especially true with regard to the scope of individual training. Section 1 of the amended Vocational Training Act 2005 states as follows: 'The object of initial training shall be to provide, in a changing working environment, the necessary technical abilities, knowledge and skills (professional scope of action) through a systematic training programme to engage in a skilled form of occupational activity. Initial training shall also enable a trainee to acquire the necessary occupational experience.' The Act says in another section that as a basis for a regulated and uniform vocational training, the responsible federal minister is charged with issuing training regulations specifying the title of the trainee occupation, the period of training (generally between two and three years), and the abilities, the knowledge and skills to be imparted in the course of training.

Every training employer is obliged to provide training systematically in accordance with a syllabus and timetable and in a form appropriate to the aim in view. The nature, syllabus, timetable and purpose of the training must be set forth in the training contract. To assist employers in setting up the training plan relating to each course of training, the training regulations are issued together with an annex giving guidelines on the systematic presentation of the syllabus and timetable of training. There has been a tendency in recent years to present training contents in the form of learning objectives. It is of decisive importance for any such presentations to make it quite clear that the essential feature of in-plant training is learning by doing. Thus there is no need to adopt categories of learning objectives such as have been formulated in educational theory. Instead, concepts should be employed that will be readily intelligible to the training employer as well.

350 recognized Training Occupations

In Germany there are currently some 350 officially-recognized training occupations, representing the basis for more than 15,000 adult occupations. That is to say that specialization does not come until training is completed, but that young persons are then able on the strength of their training to choose between several occupations. They are highly mobile, as training on the job also imparts qualifications that may be put to general use and are not bound to occupational skills.

The training regulations are a central element of the German vocational training system. Although they are incorporated in state law, trade and industry also play a decisive part in their formulation. In the preparation of these regulations, the responsible federal minister is assisted by the Federal Institute of Vocational Training, which in turn is advised by committees of experts representing the different occupational groups and appointed at the suggestion of the leading organizations of trade, industry and the unions. In their discussions, which are often difficult and protracted, the representatives must aim at making due allowance for the widely differing conditions throughout the working environment.

Harmonization between Companies and Vocational Schools

An important issue in Germany's dual training system is the allocation of training contents to the training employers or to the vocational training schools. Based on the qualifications required, which in turn are derived from the demands made by the work process, this allocation will depend solely upon which of the two sources of training provide the optimum conditions for imparting specific training contents. The simple pattern of practical training at work and theoretical training at school is no longer adequate for present-day demands. Coordination is made more difficult in practise, because the powers of jurisdiction over vocational training as laid down in the Constitution assign the training employers to the Federal Ministry of Economic Affairs and the vocational training school to the ministries of education of the federal Laender.

The Companies' Qualification for Training

The above-mentioned need to make due allowance for differing conditions throughout the working environment in formulating training regulations does not mean that every employer will have to be able to undertake training in accordance with these regulations. There will always be firms that are unable to provide training, whether because of their structure, their facilities, their degree of specialization, their production programme, the services they offer, their personnel structure and the like.

Technical developments have meant that training contents, particularly in the field of industrial training, have become increasingly complex; so much so, in fact, that in training for a large number of occupations specific training contents, especially what are known as the basic skills, have to be imparted independent of production, in separate training courses. For this purpose, medium and large-scale enterprises have installed special training workshops. For those firms that are too small to operate their own facilities, training workshops above single-firm level have been established by the Chambers and by professional associations. However, such facilities are no substitute for, but only a supplement to, training on the job, as they cannot provide the above-mentioned advantages of in-plant training: they can at best provide only a simulation of practical work.

Attendance at the vocational training schools, which accompanies on-the-job training, is compulsory for every trainee for twelve hours of instruction a week. The schools are state-run. The emphasis in instruction is on the occupation in question, and instruction is generally given in classes specializing in one occupation.

Tasks of the Chambers of Industry and Commerce

The principal tasks undertaken by the Chambers of Industry and Commerce in vocational training are the following:

Looking after and supervising training matters

One of the most important tasks of the Chambers is advising training employers on all problems connected with training, e. g. the training occupations to be considered, how training should be structured, the use of training aids, and educational, psychological and legal questions. The Chambers of Industry and Commerce also give advice to trainees. Any employer wishing to engage trainees must fulfil certain conditions as regards his suitability for this task. The firm must be able to offer facilities, production programmes or services on the basis of which the prescribed knowledge and skills may be imparted. In addition, the training employer and any training officers must have specific personal, professional and teaching qualifications. The Chambers of Industry and Commerce will ascertain before the start of training and also during the course of training whether these qualifications are present. This is done on the basis of a vocational training register kept by the Chambers of Industry and Commerce, in which all vocational training contracts must be entered. The task of looking after and supervising training matters is assigned to the training counsellors on the staff of each Chamber of Industry and Commerce.

Interim and final examinations

Generally every trainee must sit an interim examination in the course of his period of training. The examination serves to ascertain the level the trainee has reached. The competent Chamber of Industry and Commerce establishes boards of examiners to hold these examinations.

Every trainee sits a final examination at the end of his period of training in order to show that he has acquired the necessary professional qualifications. To hold these examinations, the responsible Chamber of Industry and Commerce will establish boards of examiners consisting of at least three members, being employers' and employees' representatives in equal numbers and at least one vocational school teacher. Rules to be observed in connection with final examinations are issued by the Vocational Training Committee of the Chamber, consisting of employers' and employees' representatives in equal numbers and vocational school teachers as consultant members. These rules make provision for the conditions of admission, the form of the examination, the criteria for marking, the issue of examination certificates, the consequences of breaches of the rules and the possibility of repeating the examination. The abilities to be examined are laid down in the training regulations. According to the occupation, they may provide for a test of practical and/or theoretical skills. The practical examination will call for samples of work and/or test work pieces. The theoretical test is conducted as a written and/or oral examination.

After having passed the examination, the trainee will receive an examination certificate issued by the responsible Chamber of Industry and Commerce. This certificate is not an authorization. Its principal purpose is to show that the person concerned has acquired the qualifications necessary for a specific occupation. But it is also the basis for professional progress and career advancement. Passing the final examination is one of the conditions for admission to the Masters' examination and many other further training examinations, for demonstrating the aptitude for training in a number of branches of trade, industry and commerce, and in many cases basis for the assertion of collectively-agreed claims.

Further training

The Chambers of Industry and Commerce may hold examinations as a basis for a uniform vocational training. The Vocational Training Committees issue special regulations governing the subject matter, purpose, standards, procedure and conditions of admission of such examinations. The Chamber of Industry and Commerce establishes boards of examiners to hold the examinations, subject to the same conditions as for the final examinations. To achieve an orderly and uniform system of further training, the Federal Minister for Education and Research may issue ordinances regulating the examinations. The Chambers of Industry and Commerce collaborate in formulating such regulations through experts whom they appoint.

However, the activities of the Chambers of Industry and Commerce in the field of further training are not confined to holding examinations. They also provide further training measures. In this context one may distinguish between training for advancement, the object of which is to enable the trainee to gain advancement in his job, i. e. to take on a better-qualified position in his firm, and training for adaptation, the object of which is to retain and to extend occupational knowledge and skills and to adapt them to technical developments. These are generally short-term measures, while training for advancement will normally require the trainee to attend courses totalling 500 to 700 hours of instruction. As a rule only these courses are completed by sitting an examination held by the Chamber.

Vocational retraining

The Chambers of Industry and Commerce hold examinations for persons who have been retrained for a different occupation, setting up the required boards of examiners. Where these examinations are not held for recognized training occupations, the Chambers of Industry and Commerce must issue the necessary regulations concerning subject matter, purpose, standards, procedure and conditions of admission by their Vocational Training Committees.