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Modular Education in Germany

Traditionally, the discussion around the introduction of more elements of modular education in Germany has been shaped by the fundamental differences that exist between the German and Anglo-saxon systems. One does not find a competency-based approach of the Anglosaxon system in Germany, but rather a system that puts the problem-based learning and therefore cross-linking approach in the centre of attention. “Germany has traditionally belonged to that group of countries – such as France – that take an institution-oriented or process-oriented approach. In other words, its education paths are largely anchored in institutional (vocational or academic) communities. This contrasts with the fundamentally outcomes-oriented approach taken by English-speaking countries”.¹

So, modular-like components are possible, but final cross-subject exams keep on being obligatory. Already today, modular elements exist to a certain extent in initial education in support of disadvantaged groups, preparatory courses for youth² and adult education (post-qualification), but not in the core areas of dual education and training.²

However, “discussions about the shortage of training places, and young people who are not equipped for training and the European qualification framework have triggered afresh the debate in regulatory circles about greater flexibility in occupations. This once again raises the question of the importance of the German *Berufsprinzip*, the principle of the regulated occupation”.³ The German system of vocational education and training is changing and will be newly structured for various reasons: the most prominent examples are PISA, new and newly structured occupational profiles and the learning field debate.

Furthermore, Germany is now under pressure by European harmonisation attempts to adopt modular approaches. Nevertheless, while countries like Spain and England have already set up a national qualifications framework, countries like Hungary and Germany have only started to develop a national framework in view of the consultations being held in connection with the European Qualifications Framework.⁴

In Germany, the debate on the European Qualifications Framework⁵ has worked as a catalyst. Government and industry have submitted separate advisory opinions. The Board of the Federal

¹ Hanf, Dr. Georg, Hippach-Schneider, Ute, what purpose do national qualifications frameworks serve? – A look at other countries, Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training, Bonn (ed.), *Berufsbildung in Wissenschaft und Praxis (BWP)*, No. 01/2005

² Weniger komplexe Ausbildungen als Perspektivmodell? 13.08.2003, <http://www.bibb.de/de/6093.htm>

³ Brötz, Rainer, *BiBBnews*, Issue 4/2005 November 2005, p.1

⁴ Partner conference with 16 European national vocational training institutes, May 8, 2006, <http://www.bibb.de/en/print/25552.htm>, p.1

⁵ Europäischer Qualifikationsrahmen, Cedefopinfo 06-2006, p.1-2



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Institute for Vocational Education and Training has drafted a joint platform. A roadmap was developed and a steering group set up for developing a national qualifications framework.⁶

Still, a wealth of questions has to be settled before the country can implement a national qualifications framework. These questions include whether vocational training and general education are to be placed together under one "roof", and which dimensions are to be differentiated between in connection with skills (e.g., technical, methodological, social and personal skills). Standards for qualifications and for skill assessment procedures, criteria and procedures for recognising / crediting equivalents (including skills that are acquired through work experience) and procedures for certifying non-formally and informally acquired knowledge also have to be developed. One further crucial issue is the fact that only a few training providers are certified, under the thumb of the chambers of commerce.

Against this background, in 2005 a new vocational education and training law⁷ has been adopted promoting:

- More innovation through regional co-operation
- More possible combination of schools, enterprises across the regions
- Quicker integration of modern occupational profiles
- Better acceptance of educational modules certified abroad
- certifiable „qualification building blocks“⁸ for disadvantaged youth
- usage of more flexible instruments such as modules for additional qualifications
- some form of modularisation in some pilot occupations in IT, new media and public administration.⁹

The Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB) has also launched 5 pilot projects called „in-service training and post-qualification of young adults" in the federal states of Bavaria, Berlin, Hamburg, Hesse and Thuringia.¹⁰ The aim of these pilot projects was to put the concept of a certificate and in-service training-oriented modular post-qualification to the test and to develop binding qualification standards. The innovative aspects of these model experiments are:

⁶ see also: Fahle, Klaus, Hanf, Georg, The consultation process for the European Qualifications Framework is currently in progress, <http://www.bibb.de/en/21696.htm>

⁷ Federal Ministry of Education and Research, Vocational Training Act, of 23 March 2005, (Federal Law Gazette [BGBl.], Part I, p. 931)

⁸ Reitz, Britta, Schier, Friedel, Neue Perspektiven in der beruflichen Benachteiligtenförderung?, BiBB, 20.04.2004, p.3

⁹ Federal Ministry of Education and Research, Die Reform der Beruflichen Bildung – Gegenüberstellung des Berufsbildungsgesetzes 2005 und des Berufsbildungsgesetzes 1969, Materialien zur Reform der beruflichen Bildung, Herausgegeben vom Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung 2005

¹⁰ Schapfel-Kaiser, Franz, Neue Wege zum Berufsabschluss – Modulare Qualifizierung in der Weiterbildung, in: Lernen im Arbeitsprozess: Qualifizierung an- und ungelernter junger Erwachsener mit dem Ziel eines anerkannten Berufsabschlusses, Band 9, Modulare Qualifizierung in Weiterbildung und Beschäftigung, Abschlussstagung des Modellversuchs „Lernen im Arbeitsprozess“, February 20/21, 2001, Weimar, hrsg. Von INBAS GmbH, p. 41-50



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- the modular design of qualification processes
- the linkage of in-company work and qualification
- the development of modular certificates and of a qualification pass
- the individual promotion and counselling of participants
- Quality standards were further developed by the federal states

As it gives cause to frequent misunderstanding, *modular* as mentioned here takes up the following concept :

- Modules are unequivocally defined in the frame of an occupational concept
- A module is a partial, autonomous qualification block and is related to a certified job certificate
- A module comprises an entire working activity chain
- Modules can be pieced together to a recognised occupation
- Modules can be concluded in manageable periods of time by passing successfully internal examinations
- Modules are proof of a qualification result, module certificates describe the existing occupational competencies
- Modules are not designed according to a technical-systematical approach, but with a view to occupational competencies
- Modules have to be documented within a qualification pass

An interesting collection of existing initiatives in modular education is provided in the *Good Practice Centre for disadvantaged youths*¹¹ of the Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training.

The centre provides

- a training provider database
- a knowledge centre
- qualification modules
- an event calendar
- good practise solutions

The **Network Modularisation**¹² which was sponsored by the European Social Fund and the Senate of Berlin is a regional initiative of private and public training providers founded in 2000 in Berlin. Its aim was the promotion of the modular approach and the creation of a know-how network. Co-operation partners are chambers, employers, unions and employment agencies.

Tasks of this initiative were:

¹¹ www.good-practise.de

¹² www.modulnet-berlin.de



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- the training of co-ordinators
- the provision of advise on the introduction of a qualification pass
- the consulting on development of new modular education concepts and
- support in the co-ordination and fine-tuning of concepts with chambers

It must not be kept secret that both initiatives have faced a certain deadlock because the crucial issue of development of standards made them run into financing difficulties, a situation not overcome yet and typical for the complex