VET in Schools in Germany – Reflections on re-defining the function of school-based training against the background of the training market crisis

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Universität Konstanz
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Structure of presentation

1 Structural Context

2 Strengthening VET in Schools: 2 Strategies

3 Practice Firms: Findings from a Research Project

4 Perspectives for Full-time VET in Germany
Germany – an apprenticeship country?

Share of private training contracts in the apprenticeship system (2004)

- Old federal states: 95.6 %
- New federal states: 72.3 %

[Source: Berufsbildungsbericht, 2005]
Training in Germany in the non-academic secondary sector

[Source: Berufsbildungsbericht, 2005]
Germany – an apprenticeship country?

Vocational Full-time Schools (Berufsfachschulen)
- increasing student attendance

+ 183 %: full-time VET courses outside BBiG/HwO (1990-2003)
+ 203 %: full-time VET courses according to BBiG/HwO (1995-2003)

Total number of full-time students in BFS (2003): 498.000

Total number of apprentices in the Dual System (2003): 1.6 m

[Source: Berufsbildungsbericht, 2005]
Dual System vs. VET in schools

2 subsystems that differ in terms of...

- Function
- Pedagogical orientation
- Didactical organisation
- Status and public perception
- Types of qualifications
- Legal and administrative regulation
Dual System vs. VET in schools

Major differences: function and types of qualifications

- DS is an apprenticeship system and therefore has an exclusive function to create intermediate level skills needed on the labour market (*occupational qualifications*)

- Full-time VET courses in schools are much more heterogeneous and also provide for qualifications leading – directly or indirectly - into higher education (*educational qualifications*)
Problems associated with VET in schools

- Heterogeneous types of schools and courses
- Heterogeneous length of courses
- Heterogeneous access requirements
- Heterogeneous functions and types of qualifications
- Federal state specific regulations
- Lack of acceptance and public perception among employers
- Schools often function as „parking institutions“

[cf. Feller, 2002; Euler, 2000; Gebbeken/Kahl, 2001]
Training market vs. VET in schools (BK in Baden-Württemberg)
The Vocational College (Berufskolleg – BK) in the federal state of Baden-Württemberg

- BK I (preparation for Dual System)
- BK I/II
  - Assistant qualification (conventional type)
  - Assistant qualification + polytechnic entrance qualification
  - BK Languages (BK-F)
  - BK Business Information Management
  - Dual BK (special Dual System for grammar school leavers)
- BK-FH (access studies out of employment; leads to polytechnic entrance qualification)
- BK with practice firm
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Objectives/new regulations:

- Bridging the two subsystems (apprenticeships and full-time VET) through RPL/APL (accreditation) - § 7 BBiG
- Easier access to the chamber examination for graduates from full-time VET courses - § 43 BBiG
The Regional Strategy: Reforming the curriculum of VET in Schools

“Making schools practical” – curriculum development and new teaching methods using simulation-based learning environments such as practice firms (Übungsfirmen)

Objectives of „Zukunftsoffensive III“ (since 1997) in Baden-Württemberg:

- Increasing the acceptance of full-time VET among companies
- Helping young people to apply for an apprenticeship more successfully
- Using public expenditure on VET in schools more efficiently
The Implementation of Practice Firms in the BK

- Modification of the curriculum leading to more self-regulated and realistic learning opportunities for students

- A practice firm is a fictitious company within a vocational school that works like a normal company though no real goods or money are exchanged.

- Training firms cooperate with other training firms within a national and international network.

- A real company normally provides support, money and the product name for the training firm.

- Normal number of lessons per week: 5 to 7 (in BW in the BK)
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Research Project on Practice Firms in the BK in BW (2003-2005)
[Deißinger & Ruf 2005, publication in early 2006]

2 leading questions:

■ Does the implementation of practice firm lead to new and more “realistic” learning opportunities and does it help students to develop a “comprehensive occupational competence”?

■ Has the practice firm concept potential to change companies’ attitudes towards full-time vocational courses and respective qualifications?
**Motivation for Training in the BK (students)**

„I joined the BK in order to...“

- **increase my chances to find a training place**
  - BK II: 1.65
  - BK I: 1.81
  - Total: 1.98

- **to go for the polytechnic entrance qualification**
  - BK II: 1.98
  - BK I: 2.37
  - Total: 2.37

- **to acquire basic knowledge in commerce**
  - BK II: 2.83
  - BK I: 3.06
  - Total: 3.06

- **to gain time for occupational orientation**
  - BK II: 3.06
  - BK I: 3.06
  - Total: 3.06

- **to bridge time before taking up an apprenticeship**
  - BK II: 3.06
  - BK I: 3.06
  - Total: 3.06

- **to go for an occupational (assistant) qualification**
  - BK II: 3.06
  - BK I: 3.06
  - Total: 3.06

1- totally agree; 2-partially agree; 3-partially disagree; 4- totally disagree
The major problem of BK training is the lack of practical orientation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Industry</th>
<th>36.9% totally agree</th>
<th>29.2% partially agree</th>
<th>15.4% partially disagree</th>
<th>18.5% totally disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Services</td>
<td>30.0% totally agree</td>
<td>14.0% partially agree</td>
<td>24.0% partially disagree</td>
<td>32.0% totally disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trade</td>
<td>24.4% totally agree</td>
<td>29.3% partially agree</td>
<td>17.1% partially disagree</td>
<td>29.3% totally disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crafts</td>
<td>9.1% totally agree</td>
<td>36.4% partially agree</td>
<td>18.2% partially disagree</td>
<td>36.4% totally disagree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Accreditation of BK Courses in a Subsequent Apprenticeship (companies)

„Does your company allow for a reduction of the apprenticeship duration?“

![Bar chart showing the proportion of companies allowing for a reduction of the apprenticeship duration in BK I and BK II, with percentages for no accreditation, 1/2 year, 1 year, and 2 years.]
Accreditation of BK Courses in a Subsequent Apprenticeship (according to size of companies)

„Does your company allow for a reduction of the apprenticeship duration?“

- Small companies: 9.5% BK I, 10.0% BK II
- Medium-sized companies: 54.2% BK I, 84.0% BK II
- Large companies: 58.3% BK I, 77.4% BK II
Marketability of the Assistant Qualification (according to company size)

„The vocational college (degree: commercial assistant) qualifies for direct uptake of employment“

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Company Size</th>
<th>Totally Agree</th>
<th>Partially Agree</th>
<th>Partially Disagree</th>
<th>Totally Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Small Companies</td>
<td>67.6%</td>
<td>16.2%</td>
<td>8.1%</td>
<td>8.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium-sized Companies</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
<td>20.4%</td>
<td>27.3%</td>
<td>27.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large Companies</td>
<td>20.5%</td>
<td>9.6%</td>
<td>24.7%</td>
<td>45.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Colors: 
- **totally agree**
- **partially agree**
- **partially disagree**
- **totally disagree**
Valued Potential of Practice Firms in the Training Market (companies)

„Would practice firms lead to accreditation of courses in your company?“

- No accreditation after BK I so far:
  - 33,3% totally agree
  - 30,0% partially agree
  - 26,7% partially disagree
  - 10,0% totally disagree

- No accreditation after BK II so far:
  - 20,0% totally agree
  - 50,0% partially agree
  - 25,0% partially disagree
  - 5,0% totally disagree
Valued Potential of Practice Firms in the Labour Market (companies)

„Would practice firms increase the acceptance of the assistant qualification?“

- Companies that accept direct access to employment:
  - 46.4% totally agree
  - 14.6% partially agree
  - 14.6% partially disagree
  - 24.4% totally disagree

- Companies that refuse direct access to employment:
  - 40.6% partially agree
  - 53.6% totally agree
Summary of Project Findings

**Young people rate practice firms as**
enriching learning environments offering realistic learning experiences
more motivating and interesting than traditional lessons

**Companies rate practice firms as**
not yet full substitutes for an apprenticeship
although the overall acceptance for partial accreditation of BK courses lies at around 50 % and might be increased by implementing practice firms
and acceptance of the assistant qualification is quite high with smaller companies
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3 alternative or complementary strategies for re-defining the status of full-time VET

- Strengthening the qualification function and the „practical curriculum“ of full-time VET without changing the „system“ and its relationship to the Dual System (making use of the new BBiG)

- „Dualising“ vocational courses in schools by linking up the school with the company (structured internships, block training, sandwich system etc.)

- Shifting qualifications based on the BBiG away from the Dual System and into the school system

[see also: Euler, 2000; Feller, 2005]