

Germany: Working conditions in apprenticeships

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In Germany, 71.4% of apprentices in 2014 were 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied' with their training, according to the German Confederation of Trade Unions (DGB). However, its report calls for more, and better quality, apprenticeships. In December 2014 an alliance of employers, unions and national government representatives was set up to promote vocational and further training.

A report by the Federal Employment Agency (BA) anticipates the number of working people will drop by 6.5 million by 2025 (in German, 4.1 MB PDF). The Federal Ministry for Education and Research (BMBF) says the number of newly concluded apprenticeship contracts is also slowly decreasing (in German, 1.83 MB PDF). In a report published in April 2014 the BMBF reveals that 530,714 new contracts were concluded between 1 October 2012 and 30 September 2013, a drop of 20,544 contracts (-3.7%) over the previous year. At the same time, 148,635 apprenticeship contracts, or 24.4% of the total, were prematurely dissolved in 2012.

The DGB argues that good working conditions are key to getting more young people interested in doing an apprenticeship and securing enough skilled labour for the future. With this in mind, the DGB's youth section publishes a regular report on apprenticeship conditions (in German, 676 KB PDF). The latest report, published in September 2014, is based on interviews with 18,357 apprentices working in the 25 most popular occupations (for training) between September 2013 and April 2014.

Assessment of apprenticeship positions

According to the report, in 2014, 71.4% of the respondents were 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied' with their apprenticeship and working conditions. Those apprenticed as industrial mechanics, clerks in industry or in banks, mechatronic engineers and IT specialists reported the best conditions. Those training to become chefs, painters or varnishers, hotel managers, dental assistants or sales assistants in the food trade were most critical of their conditions.

Apprentices' satisfaction with training depends on factors such as the quality of training, overtime, pay and career prospects.

Quality of training

Over 70% of the respondents stated that the quality of the training in their establishment was 'very good' or 'good'. Another 17.8% stated that their training was 'satisfactory', and only 10.9% said it was 'sufficient' or 'inadequate'.

The overwhelming majority (92.6%) have a training instructor where they work, and only 10.8% of the apprentices said their trainer was rarely or never at the workplace. Some 68.5% of those who had instructors said they were 'always' or 'frequently' supportive. The report shows that overall satisfaction levels and successful apprenticeships rely heavily on the instructor giving good support and behaving correctly.

However, the German dual system of vocational training requires classroom teaching as well as workplace training. The apprentices' assessment of the teaching quality at vocational schools was less impressive, with only 56.2% of them reporting 'very good' or 'good' lessons, 28.7% judging lessons to be 'satisfactory' and 15.1% judging them to be only 'sufficient' or 'inadequate'.

Working time

About

Country: Germany

Author: Sandra Vogel

Institution: Cologne Institute for
Economic Research (IW
Köln)

Some 82.4% of the respondents reported working up to 40 hours a week, with 36.6% having to work overtime regularly. Apprentices working in the hotel, restaurant and catering industry or in the food craft trades reported working more overtime than industrial mechanics or office administrators. In addition, overtime was more often worked in smaller companies (up to 20 employees).

Some 68.4% of those working overtime said they were paid for this or took time off in lieu. However, 17.1% said they were neither paid nor given time off in lieu for working overtime.

As the report shows, working overtime also affects the level of apprentices' satisfaction with their position. Some 32.1% of those apprentices not working overtime regularly were 'very satisfied' with their apprenticeship. However, only 19.9% of the respondents who regularly had to work longer hours were 'very satisfied'.

Pay and career prospects

The average pay for those taking part in the survey was €670 per month. However, there are considerable variations between occupations: 50.1% of the respondents earned between €500 and €750 per month, 30.9% received between €750 and €1,000 per month and another 16.4% made between €250 and €500 a month.

The report also notes that sectoral differences in pay affect young people's ability to secure an independent livelihood. While 64.4% of apprentice industrial mechanics and 63.9% of apprentice bank clerks said that they were able to do so, this was only the case for 33.7% of the apprentices in the hotel trade and 30.4% in hairdressing. Some 11.5% had another job to boost their income.

Some 39.3% of the respondents in their third and last year of training had already been offered employment by their company once their apprenticeship ended. However, 14.8% had been refused further employment and 45.9% were still waiting to find out. Of those having already received a job offer from their employer, 63.4% were offered an open-ended contract. Larger companies with more than 250 employees seemed more likely to offer a fixed-term contract, while smaller companies with up to 20 employees more often opted for an open-ended contract. Satisfaction levels were naturally higher for those apprentices who had already been offered employment after their apprenticeship.

Position of the social partners

The DGB youth section says it is clear from the data collected for its report that apprentices in the most criticised occupations are more likely to drop out of their training. It suggests improvements such as inspecting companies to ensure compliance with Youth Employment Law, plus giving apprentices a 'living wage' and providing vocational schools with better equipment.

In addition to the Youth Guarantee, the DGB also wants a guaranteed open-ended employment contract for those who successfully complete their apprenticeship. In its view, good working conditions, additional support measures for apprentices and training establishments, and improved careers advice in schools are needed to reduce the numbers of drop-outs and secure the future supply of skilled labour.

Employers, however, spent 10 years (2004–2014) collaborating with government representatives and the Federal Employment Agency in [the Pact on Apprenticeships \(in German\)](#) in order to enable young people to get apprenticeships or other types of training.

In the last vocational training year, from 1 October 2013 to 30 September 2014, 303,129 apprenticeships were registered by the chambers of industry and commerce (2.0% fewer than in the previous year) and 128,498 were registered by the chambers of skilled crafts (1.7% fewer than in the previous year). Another 41,729 contracts were concluded in the liberal professions (1.4% fewer than in the previous year). In the same period, however, the chambers of industry and commerce and the chambers of skilled crafts had around 100,000 apprenticeship positions that they were unable to fill. This was thought to be because of mismatches between the applicants' skills and the companies' trainee profiles, or between applicants' skills and regional needs.

Employers want to improve the matches between unfilled positions and unplaced applicants and are supporting targeted 'assistance' measures for weaker pupils/apprentices, and help for SMEs taking on these young people. While the Pact on Apprenticeships ended in 2014, a new alliance for vocational and further training has been set up for 2015–2018. Unlike the Pact on Apprenticeships, in which the DGB did not participate, the latest alliance unites unions, employers and government representatives.

Commentary

The lack of skilled labour cannot simply be blamed on poor working conditions for apprentices, according to the Cologne Institute for Economic Research (IW). In a press statement on 4 September 2014, the IW agreed that attractive working conditions are of great importance (in German) for securing sufficient skilled labour for the future. However, it said that the declining number of school-leavers and the increase in the number of young people opting for an academic career also made it harder for companies to find talent.