

Research Unit Vocational Education and Training

Our Topics

The research unit “Vocational Education and Training” focusses its work on the dual system of vocational education and training (VET). It analyses how the VET system can be further developed to meet the needs of an ever changing economy. Furthermore, it identifies trends in lifelong learning as well as skills shortages on the labour market. This includes research on the following topics:

- Dual system of vocational education and training**
The researchers analyse the German dual VET system which combines work-based and school-based learning. They investigate trends in supply and demand of apprenticeship positions and how VET can remain sustainable and attractive for both young people and enterprises. Furthermore, school-to-work-transitions are analysed.
- Continuing vocational training**
Topics in this area include the rate and extent of companies’ activities in continuing vocational training, e.g., by providing refresher courses, e-learning or other forms of lifelong learning. Every three years IW researchers conduct the representative “IW Continuing Vocational Training Survey”.
- Skilled workers**
Skilled workers are vital for the success of German enterprises. Research on the availability or shortage of skilled workers as well as potential solutions to this problem – in particular for small and medium enterprises (SMEs) – are major topics of the research unit.
- International Research on VET**
In particular due to the low youth unemployment rates the interest of other

countries in the German dual VET system is growing. Therefore, researchers exchange regularly with representatives of other countries how dual elements in VET can be strengthened and how employee training can be promoted. Furthermore, the research unit provides information about foreign VET systems and foreign qualifications (www.bq-portal.de) to enhance transparency for companies, to help migrants getting qualified work and to support the competent bodies in the equivalence assessment.

Many of the topics of the research unit are closely linked to other research units concerned with schooling, academic qualifications, labour market, migration issues, inter alia. The main focus is on Germany. However, in many topics, there is a strong connection to European policy-making (e.g., concerning the implementation of “dual” elements abroad). We provide expertise to the public and political debate.

Our findings and positions

Inclusive power of VET

Germany has Europe’s lowest youth unemployment rate – largely due to its dual VET system that helps integrate young people in the labour market right after they leave school. It is especially effective in providing qualified and recognized degrees and is a valuable alternative to university for young people.

Enhancing permeability

While the dual VET system helps the youth to get a foot into the door of the labour market, steps need to be taken to further communicate its attractiveness in times of demographic

changes and educational shifts. Eased transition between the vocational and the academic track – in both directions – is thus indispensable in providing adequate opportunities for youths in both qualification tracks.

Lifelong learning

Vocational qualification is not the end point of a professional career; instead, it is the starting point for lifelong learning and the onset of further vocational training. Employers invest € 33.5 million per year to keep the skills of their employees at the most up-to-date level, as this increases productivity and innovative capacity. Especially the participation rate of low-qualified people should rise to increase their productivity and career opportunities.

Digitization and Industry 4.0

The internet of things and the ongoing digitization in everyday business influences jobs and qualification needs. While the digital transformation will create jobs rather than destroy them, “new” qualifications increase in demand while “old” skills need to be updated. We closely monitor these developments. First evidence shows that the German VET system is well prepared for the digital future. However, the need for lifelong learning and e-learning strategies is growing.

Careers with VET

Many workers with advanced vocational degrees earn comparable salaries and have comparable responsibility as their peers with academic degrees – an often neglected fact in the debate about the value of VET. Promoting such knowledge about the equivalency is vital for enterprises in search of apprentices and vocationally skilled personnel.

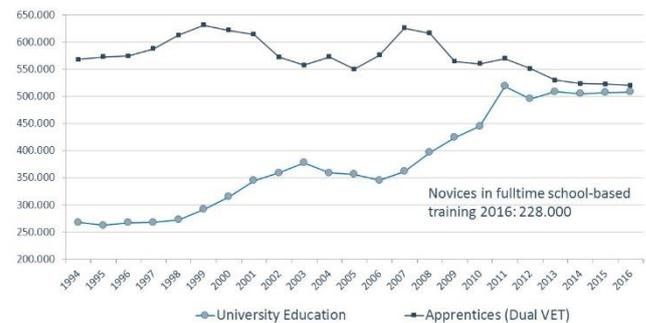
SMEs

SMEs form the backbone of Germany’s economy. They also train most of the apprentices and are in need of adequately skilled labour. Focusing on ways to answer to their need to find and retain such workers – particularly in competition to large enterprises – is the aim of the “Kompetenzzentrum Fachkräftesicherung”

(www.kofa.de) which offers targeted advice and guidance for the field of human resource management. This includes also the integration of refugees in education and work.

Policy should strengthen VET in Europe

VET can help to reduce youth unemployment. Therefore, the European Union should reinforce work-based learning in education and promote mobility of young people.



Source: Federal Statistical Office, Federal Institute for Vocational Training

Selected publications

in English:

Körbel, Markus / Pierenkemper, Sarah / Zibrowius, Michael, 2017, Gaining and retaining skilled personnel abroad – what do German companies do?, Expertise, Cologne

in German:

Burstedde, Alexander / Malin, Lydia / Risius, Paula, 2017, Fachkräfteengpässe in Unternehmen – Rezepte gegen den Fachkräftemangel, Studie im Rahmen des vom Bundesministerium für Wirtschaft und Energie geförderten Kompetenzzentrum Fachkräftesicherung, Cologne

Flake, Regina / Malin, Lydia / Risius, Paula, 2017, Bildungsentscheidungen von Abiturienten für Ausbildung und Studium, IW-Trends 3/2017, Cologne

Metzler, Christoph / Seyda, Susanne / Wallossek, Luisa / Werner, Dirk, 2017, Menschen mit Behinderung in der betrieblichen Ausbildung, IW-Analyse No. 114, Cologne

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