

Quality assurance of company based training in the dual system in Germany

A summary of the guidance¹ for practitioners and VET experts

Introduction

1. The dual system is firmly established in the German education system. The main characteristic of the system is cooperation between mainly small and medium sized companies, and publicly funded vocational schools. This cooperation is regulated by law. Trainees in the dual system typically spend part of each week at a vocational school and the other part of the week at a company, or they spend longer periods in each place before alternating. Dual training usually lasts from two to three-and-a-half years. Most federal states² stipulate in law that quality management systems should be in place in the vocational schools. This document looks at how the company-based aspects of training are quality assured.
2. Within the dual system, the Federal Government is responsible for the company-based aspects of training whilst the school-based aspects fall within the remit of the federal states. The employers and employees are equally represented via their respective umbrella organisations in the management committees at the regional and national level. They have equal voting rights in the VET committees at the chambers, in the Federal State Committees for VET and in the Board, sub-committees and working groups of the Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB).

The quality assurance system

3. The dual system of VET is a tried and tested route to an initial vocational qualification for young people and helps to guarantee a supply of skilled workers across the whole of the economy. The dual training system is based on companies offering training places and the individual decisions of young people regarding training in a certain occupation or company. The Federal Government, the federal states, the social partners and other stakeholders endeavour to ensure companies offer training contracts and young people are interested in entering into such arrangements. They also seek to ensure that these contracts are successfully completed and lead to contracts of employment.
4. The QA system aims to ensure VET complies with minimum standards in order to:
 - integrate young people into society;
 - qualify them for work within an occupation;
 - meet company requirements for skilled workers.Many stakeholders work together to achieve these objectives. Within the legal framework, the provision of training by the company is monitored by the chambers.

¹ The full brochure (98 pages) was produced by BIBB (<https://www.bibb.de/en/>) and is available at https://www.bibb.de/en/pressemitteilung_78177.php This summary has been prepared by EQAVET to support the peer learning activity in Berlin in December 2019.

² Germany is a federal republic consisting of sixteen states.

5. The dual system's QA system recognises that companies have many motives for providing training - usually these focus on securing a supply of skilled workers to retain or enhance competitiveness, or to meet their social obligation. The dual system's QA processes are designed to encourage companies to decide to offer training and young people to enter training. However, despite the importance of encouraging companies and learners to become involved in the dual system, young peoples' acquisition of occupational proficiency cannot be jeopardised. To safeguard the quality of the dual system everyone is required to comply with minimum standards which have been designed to support institutions and programmes at a regional and federal level. The company providing training has to take account of the minimum standards from the time that they offer a training place until the time that a learner completes training. The companies know that many partner organisations and institutions are on hand to offer direct and indirect assistance.
6. There are two different approaches to quality assurance in the dual system: one which is used for the vocational schools and one which is used for company-based training. For the school-based parts of the dual system, a majority of the federal states work with a defined quality management system, and state-specific variations of the ISO and EQFM models have frequently been developed. The nature of quality assurance in vocational schools in Germany is in line with the principles set out in the EQAVET Reference Framework and QA cycle shown in figure 1.

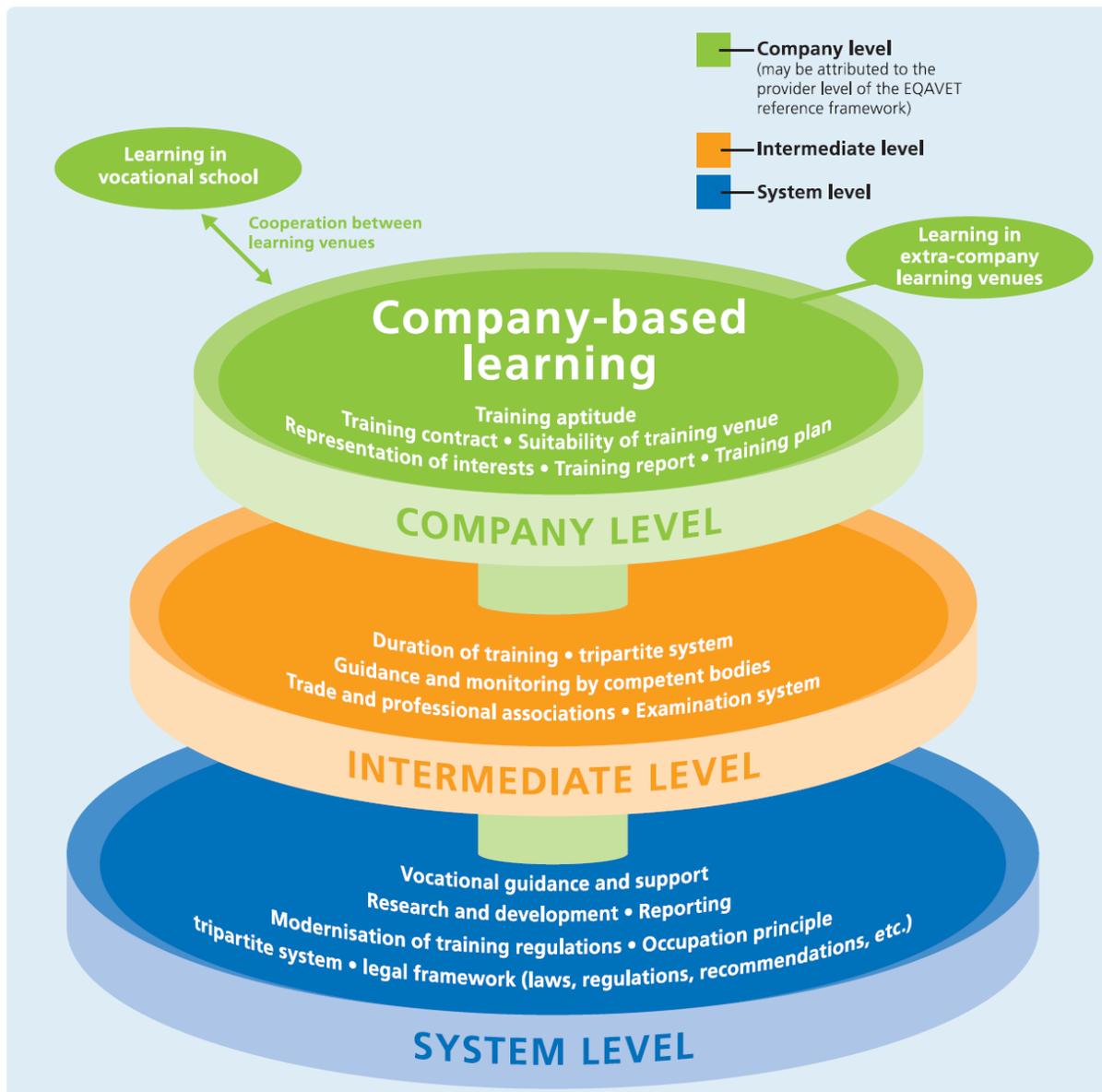
Figure 1 - the QA cycle



7. The quality of training in companies (the learning venue at which trainees normally spend the most time) is assured in a different way. In the companies the basis for QA is determined by legislation, regulations and recommendations which establish minimum standards. Quality assurance in company-based training does not rely on the process-orientated approach in the EQAVET Recommendation - instead its primary basis is the setting of, compliance with and monitoring of minimum standards.
8. The quality assurance in company-based training depends on a broad range of instruments at three VET levels – the system level, the intermediate level and the company level (Figure 2). At the system level rules (such as statutory principles and training regulations) are developed and put in place to establish minimum standards for quality assurance in VET. These standards are

monitored at the intermediate level and implemented at the provider level i.e. by the companies which offer training. At each level in the system, organisations and stakeholders have clearly-defined roles. Taken together their actions provide an holistic approach which quality assures the company-based aspects of the dual system.

Figure 2 - the three levels



- At the intermediate level, the chambers play a major role in quality assurance in line with the tasks they are assigned by the state. These include the provision of guidance to companies and trainees, monitoring the implementation of vocational education and training and organising the examinations. They make decisions regarding the shortening or extension of the duration of training as well as contributing to the training of VET staff by organising advanced training examinations.

10. Company decisions on whether to offer training within the dual system take place on a voluntary basis. (In 2016 more than 430,000 businesses - mainly small and medium sized enterprises - provided training.) Each company makes an autonomous decision regarding the training places they offer. There are no sanctions in the form of levies for non-participation. Nevertheless, companies opting to provide training are required to meet the statutory minimum requirements. Companies can stipulate further quality criteria above and beyond the minimum requirements and they may set their own benchmarks using their own quality management systems. With regard to the content of training, companies have sufficient leeway to increase its depth or breadth.
11. The company-based aspects of quality assurance are based on three pillars:
 - the suitability of the company to provide training;
 - a clear explanation of the rights and responsibilities of the parties providing training and trainees;
 - cooperation with the vocational schools.
12. As part of their commitment to offer high quality training, companies prepare a training contract and a training plan for the trainee. Trainees are required to exercise due care and attention in executing the tasks assigned to them within the scope of their training and to take part in examinations. Trainees must follow the instructions given by training staff and use the proper procedures in the training venue e.g. they must handle tools, machines and other equipment carefully and maintain confidentiality in respect of company and business secrets. A proper written record of their training must be kept and submitted on a regular basis.

The cornerstones of quality

13. The three layers of responsibility provide the QA framework for supporting the dual system. Taking account of each of these layers, it is possible to analyse the QA system and identify some key characteristics of quality (called cornerstones as shown in figure 3).
14. Number 1 - The state, employers and employees work together to shape the dual system. The interactions between the state, trade unions, employers and chambers are firmly established. The equal involvement of employers and employees creates the foundation for the consensus principle. Legislation and the development of standards in VET take place with the participation and consent of the social partners in their capacity as relevant stakeholders and contractual parties in the labour market. Their involvement guarantees that the reality of VET practice is identified and taken into account. Their agreement produces an expectation that the implementation of laws, regulations and standards will be successful.
15. Number 2 - VET planning is based on indicators and this aids reporting. The Federal Ministry of Education and Research monitors developments in VET, and by 1 April each year publishes a "Report on Vocational Education and Training". This sets out the current status and probable development of VET. It contains information for the previous calendar year on the number of VET contracts that have been concluded and are still in existence, the number of vacant training places, and the number of people registered as training place applicants. Forecasts for the demand and supply of training places for the current calendar year are included.

Figure 3 - cornerstones



16. Number 3 - Continuous improvements are based on research and development projects, pilot projects. Each constituent part of the dual system is evaluated on an ongoing basis and changed in the light of economic, societal and technical developments. Pilot projects provide an impetus for innovation and are evaluated via academic research. These projects develop evidence-based, practical and feasible solutions and provide development tools for modernising the system.
17. Number 4 - The structure of training is based on regulations. In 2019 there were 326 training occupations which were regulated in a standardised way. These regulations set out the minimum standards and include: information on the title of the occupation, duration of training, the training profile (professional skills, knowledge and competences), the training plan (content and the allocation of time for training) and the examination requirements. This level of clarity helps young people to develop their personality, identify with an occupation, and acquire occupational

experience. Vocational education and training is broadly based as this provides a solid foundation for personal development and lifelong learning.

18. Number 5 - State recognised training occupations are designed and updated to reflect practical learning. The regulatory procedure ensures that qualifications meet the needs of the labour market and can be adapted to meet current and future developments in a timely manner. Learning objectives are broad and designed to retain validity when changes take place in the world of work. The modernisation of the training regulations or the creation of new occupations only takes place when there are significant changes in the labour market. The training occupations are based on proposals from the social partners and the outcomes of VET research.
19. Number 6 - Young people receive support from vocational guidance institutions, programmes and databases. Support with vocational orientation begins when young people are in school. Various approaches are used in federal states e.g. most schools have practical placement weeks which offer pupils an insight into the world of work. Career entry support workers are available in some schools and they help learners to search for a training place. The Federal Ministry of Education and Research has a vocational orientation programme which enables pupils to explore their strengths and try various occupational areas. A range of measures supports young people without a training place as they move from school to work. This includes a pre-vocational training year and a basic vocational training year which offer vocational orientation and preparation for training.
20. Number 7 - Trainers are personally and professionally suited to provide training. Trainers need the necessary occupational and vocational teaching skills, knowledge and competences. They need to pass a state-recognised examination in a specialism that is relevant to the training occupation. This examination may be completed alongside the company's provision of dual training, through full-time school-based training or attendance at an institute of higher education. Occupational and vocational teaching aptitude is checked in an examination. Successful completion of a master craftsman examination is considered as evidence of occupational and vocational teaching aptitude.
21. Number 8 - Training venues must be suitable for VET. Deciding whether a training venue is suitable starts as soon as a company applies to become a registered training company with the chamber. Suitability is based on a specific training occupation and is not valid generally. Suitability is based on the relevant training regulations which are used by the company to develop their training plan with information on specific workplaces, phases of training, training content and the amount of time allocated to each aspect of training. Training which cannot be provided at the company may take place at inter-company vocational training centres or be delivered in cooperation with other partners. Decisions on suitability are taken by the chamber.
22. Number 9 - The rights and obligations in the training contract are regulated. The preparation of a training contract and its registration with the competent body are prerequisites for training. The contractual partners are the organisation providing training and the trainee. Consent from a legal guardian is required for trainees aged under the age of 18. Trainees receive remuneration and paid leave. Training allowances rise annually as the VET programme progresses.
23. Number 10 - The occupational proficiency gained by each trainee is assessed by an examination board of the competent body. Candidates are required to demonstrate mastery of the necessary

occupational skills; possession of the required occupational knowledge and competences; and familiarity with the teaching material from the vocational school. The final examination is organised by the chamber which sets up independent examination boards with at least three members. These members must be competent in the areas of the examination and be suitable people to be involved in the examination system. The examination board must include an equal number of representatives from employers and employees and at least one vocational school teacher. The examination board evaluates individual and overall examination performance and decides whether the trainee has passed.

24. Number 11 - Companies and vocational schools collaborate to provide VET. Collaboration helps to ensure the content of training is in line with the training regulations and skeleton curricula. This collaboration is essential because both learning venues are responsible for the trainee's acquisition of practical competences. Working together creates opportunities for the joint development of cross-venue training projects which link theory and practice. And vocational school teachers are able to learn more about the current requirements of company practice. They are also able to easily exchange information on individual trainees (e.g. their attendance, motivation, performance and social behaviour).

Quality assurance within the context of EQAVET

25. The German Reference Point for QA in VET (see www.deqa-vet.de) seeks to foster the "culture of quality assurance" mentioned in the EQAVET Recommendation. Its main focus is supporting the network of VET stakeholders and institutions. DEQA-VET operates at a European, national and regional level and assumes a mediating role between the various stakeholders. It aims to secure flows of information, instigate initiatives and promote a deeper understanding of quality assurance in VET.

Conclusion

26. By operating a strong quality assurance, which is understood and supported by stakeholders at all three layers in the system, Germany is able to make VET more attractive - both to companies and potential learners. As set out in paragraph 5, the dual system's QA processes are designed to encourage companies to offer training and young people to enter training.