

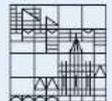
Hybrid qualifications

Increasing the value of Vocational Education and Training in the context of Lifelong Learning

Policy Implications/ Policy Recommendations



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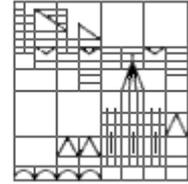
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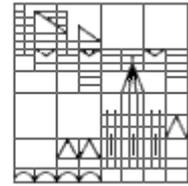
Policy Implications / Policy Recommendations

Policy implications / policy recommendations deriving from our research findings point, for the German case, to the following aspects, which can also be seen as virulent “building sites” for the VET system in this country:

- Equivalence of vocational and general education as a basic prerequisite for hybridity
- Integration of hybridity without widening the length of study or courses
- Preserving the qualification function of apprenticeship training when combining qualifications for the labour market and entitlements for higher education
- Strengthening the qualification character of full-time training courses as a prerequisite for the implementation of hybridity
- Early start of hybridity through a general reform approach and systemic coordination and integration
- Improving transition between apprenticeship and higher education
- Convincing companies and adolescents of the high potential of hybrid qualifications
- Differentiation of hybrid qualifications instead of arbitrary generalisation

1. Equivalence of vocational and general education as a basic prerequisite for hybridity

In Germany, even if one considers the lively educational reform debate on this topic in the 1960s and 1970s, the traditional institutional separation of general and vocational education has always, mostly subjectively, been accompanied by a higher evaluation of general in relation to vocational education. *“The vocational training system is somehow regarded as second class”* and *“the person trained in a German high school apparently is seen as more ‘valuable’”* (Hybrid Teacher: 23; 122). This widespread assumption of disparity between the two sub-systems and the respective degrees has to be overcome and needs to be replaced by a consciousness of real equality. The majority of the interviewees regard this as a first and fundamental reform step for the vocational training system if hybrid qualifications were to be introduced (Policy Maker 2: 58, 120; see also Policy Maker 3: 94; Social Partner 2: 59; VET Programme Manager 1: 20). However, looking back into the history of education, this kind of

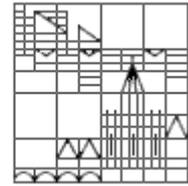


equivalence appears as a major obstacle as it cannot be realised by simply introducing new courses, new qualifications and new curricula.

Against this background, the demand for a social consciousness of equivalence of vocational and general education has to be reflected in a didactical and curricular perspective and requires suitable standards for the competences that are needed for both spheres. Hence “*the competences which build up the maturity for a job in terms of an ability to study*” (Policy Maker 2: 58) have to be discussed and defined on a curricular level. In this context uniformity is not supposed to be of higher value than similarity in terms of the highest possible convergence of the vocational curriculum and the curriculum of general education. It may be seen as an unchallenged fact that the competences acquired in vocational and general education courses respectively and the aims and contents for their didactical realisation can be thoroughly different. It is obvious that this is a problem which contains a kind of paradoxy since vocational competences are not automatically apt for being used in a higher education context normally served by the general education system.

2. Integration of hybridity without widening the length of study or courses

It is the demand for an integration of hybrid qualifications into apprenticeship programmes without increasing the underlying training periods which appears closely connected with the above-mentioned specification of “equivalence without uniformity” on the curricular level. To achieve this, two basic scenarios of realisation were mentioned by our stakeholder interviewees. One argument points out that this could become possible, “*if a university entrance certificate can be identified within the dual system without the requirement of additional general studies*” (Policy Maker 2: 122). This claim, however, implies complete equivalence of vocational and general contents. Other stakeholders consider this kind of identity between general and vocational education indeed as a fundamental basis for necessary reform steps, but on the curricular level they think more pragmatically: additional general contents need to be incorporated into the existing training schemes although this inevitably implies using additional “*time for study in the evening or at the weekends*” (Social Partner 1: 115; see also VET Programme Manager 2: 78; Hybrid Trainer: 74). According to this proposal, integration hereby means that general education has to be realised on top of



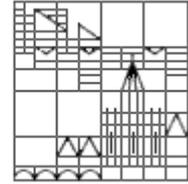
vocational training and, despite the additional workload, approximation between the curricula of general and vocational education is seen as a prerequisite for hybridity.

3. Preserving the qualification function of apprenticeship training when combining qualifications for the labour market and entitlements

Apprenticeship in the dual system is virtually exclusively functional in relation to portable labour-market relevant qualifications that are both socially and economically accepted. If any option of additional general contents in vocational training courses were to be realised, it would be important that these contents “do not compromise the value of the qualifying vocational degrees”, since there is also a risk of a “dilution of qualifying functions” - for instance due to a potentially decreasing “share of in-company learning” (*University Professor 1: 120*). In this context, scepticism among companies is being put forward as a major argument against hybrid qualifications – a facet which becomes understandable when looking to the German apprenticeship tradition, which has always kept the state’s responsibility and the didactical part of the vocational school in an inferior (though not unnecessary) function and position in relation to the workplace as a learning site.

4. Strengthening the qualification character of full-time training courses as a basic prerequisite for the implementation of hybridity

Against the background of the company-related and overtly functional character of the dual system it seems important - especially in the German context - to position hybrid qualifications not only in relation to apprenticeship with the aim to realise an additional function in terms of entitlements towards higher education. Besides an attainment of a university entrance certificate in the dual system, the idea of hybrid qualifications should also consider full-time, i.e. school-based training courses. In contrast to dual training courses, in full-time VET in Germany “the training function is denied to a large extent” (*Hybrid Trainer: 164; see also Social Partner 4: 99; University Professor 1: 69*). Instead, the “function to create an educational entitlement (*Berechtigungsfunktion*) is in the foreground” (*Hybrid Trainer: 164*). Besides the interests of employers to prevent the development of a “competitive system of qualifications” (*Social Partner 4: 99*), this result of our research is

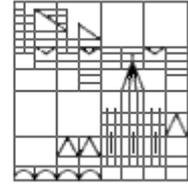


also due to “*the resistance of vocational schools against being under the thumb of too strong influence from enterprises*” (University Professor 2: 45).

In order to increase the value of qualifications in full-time vocational schools, it might be considered important to enhance “*the practical relevance*” (VET Programme Manager 2: 111) of these courses (e.g. the vocational colleges). This would certainly lead to some kind of convergence towards what practical, workplace training in the dual system distinguishes from school-based vocational learning. To create an environment for combined learning in theory and practice, it seems necessary to equip full-time schools with “*modern technology and good workshops*” (Social Partner 2: 128) and/or to offer systematic internships in terms of alternating course structures (Social Partner 2: 128; see also VET Programme Manager 2: 111). While so far dual vocational training and studying towards a university (or polytechnic) entrance certificate through a vocational full-time course have been detached from each other, an integration of skill formation on the one hand, and the aspiration towards an entitlement for higher education on the other, in both vocational sub-systems (apprenticeship training and vocational full-time schools) would be a step to bring about equality of esteem between the two markedly segregated areas of learning. As shown, this would require serious and far-reaching reform measures with respect to both sub-systems which currently seems rather unlikely.

5. Early start of hybridity through a general reform approach and systemic coordination and integration

As both in the VET system and between vocational education and higher education clear borders exist, there is also a strong conviction that (pre-vocational) school education has to support the competence basis for subsequent courses. One effect is that teachers in vocational full-time schools often “*conceive themselves as a kind of repair system for the failures of schools for general education*” (Social Partner 2: 17). Consequently it appears necessary that “*the development of students’ skills should start in time*” (Social Partner 2: 155). Thus hybrid qualifications require an implementation which is not isolated. A systemic reform is required, also setting in on previous and parallel sub-systems such as the lower and intermediate secondary school system (10-16) and the so-called “transition system”. It could help to increase the competences of young people before they pass over to the dual system or



full-time, i.e. school-based training courses. Therefore, one recommendation for action in this context is the implementation of hybrid qualifications within an “*extensive educational reform*” (Social Partner 2: 155).

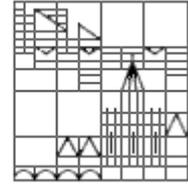
6. Improving transition between apprenticeship and higher education

For the purpose of making transition between vocational education and scientific work at university smoother and, at the same time, maintaining quality standards of and in universities in the long run, “*courses with a bridging/transition function (‘Brückenkurse’)*” are regarded as one crucial step (Policy Maker 3: 45; see also Policy Maker 5: 34; Social Partner 4: 10; University Rectors Conference: 27, 31). With these courses “*a compensation of missed contents in apprenticeships is intended by the help of universities or in cooperation between universities and vocational educational institutions*” (University Rectors Conference: 27). However, it also seems conceivable to implement these courses into an existing curriculum and thus “*to extend the curriculum for hybrid qualifications by the development of the ability to study (‘Hochschulreife’)*” (Social Partner 3: 74).

Furthermore, overcoming what may be called the “jungle” of various measures for individual progression, assisted studies could contribute to a successful transition from apprenticeship into polytechnic or university education with a hybrid qualification. The question is “*which support exactly young people need who find their way to university via apprenticeship training and the field of vocational practice*” (VET Programme Manager 1: 42). Such a support could be provided by individual assistants. In Germany their work is already part of the public debate as there is a major need to help and monitor young people in the “transition system” who are not completely mature to start an apprenticeship but who strive for apprenticeship training (VET Programme Manager 1: 42).

7. Convincing companies and adolescents of the high potential of hybrid qualifications

Because policy-makers in Germany are not getting tired of claiming that the apprenticeship system has to be strengthened, while at the same time insisting that progression into higher education ought to be pushed, the “multi-functionality” of vocational schools in general has to be seen in a new light. As their function at the moment seems to be strongly linked to entry into further or higher education through specific entitlements rather than to the purpose of

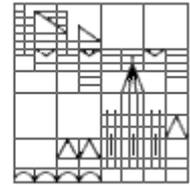


delivering labour market qualifications, hybridity here could open up new ways of thinking and also potential reform steps. However, with respect to full-time vocational education, research has shown that with regard to these schools, which already offer hybrid qualifications (especially towards polytechnic studies), companies have steadily denied the value of these qualifications being at par with the dual system.

First, the target group of potential graduates of double qualifying degrees “*should be convinced of the [double qualification] [...] as a highly potential and sustainable option*” (University Professor 2: 48). Second, it seems even more important (as the first aspect conditions the second one substantially) to convince companies by helping them to reduce their reservations. Due to the increasing “need for skilled personnel” it seems obvious though not completely clear that hybridity lies in their interest to advance strong learners to proceed to university after their apprenticeship. Hereby, it is held important “*to convince the companies of the fact that the advantages will prevail their efforts*” (VET Manager 2: 78). However, it is not only necessary to convince companies of the long-term potential and the positive effects of higher qualifications, but “*to develop framework conditions to keep trainees in their companies [after their studies at university]*” (Social Partner 5: 80; University Professor 2: 48).

8. Differentiation of hybrid qualifications instead of arbitrary generalisation

Due to the existing “wide spectrum” of occupations in the German apprenticeship system, spreading from high-level and well-reputed “skilled occupations” such as the “banking clerk” to more practical trades such as the “building cleaner”, hybrid qualifications should only be introduced in a differentiated way (University Professor 2: 25). One criterion for the decision whether a hybrid qualification could be implemented into an existing training scheme could be “a high affinity to corresponding courses of studies”. For example, as one stakeholder maintains, “*in commercial occupations hybrid qualifications are more likely to be implemented because of the huge field of bachelor courses (business and economics) in higher education which came into consideration recently*” (University Professor 2: 25). Furthermore the criterion of complexity should be taken into account which “*would make a hybrid qualification conceivable in demanding technical (dual system) occupations such as the electrician*” (University Professor 2: 25).



Conclusion

Our suggestion for the German case is that a strong apprenticeship system makes it more difficult to adopt an European approach envisaging a more “open” VET system, with links to other educational sub-systems including higher education. As we have picked up the issues of “hybridity” (in particular with respect to the Austrian VET system) and also “diversification”, we have tried to show that both issues, in political and practical terms, are obviously rather underrepresented in the German VET context. It is interesting that Austria, as one of the traditional “apprenticeship countries” in Europe, but also France, as a typical “school model”, have implemented “European tools” in their respective VET systems (*Deißinger/Heine/Ott 2011*). Although the issue remains open whether this is really due to the European VET agenda, other countries appear to be more “prepared” than Germany. German VET policy might be well advised to look to its neighbouring countries not just for “European” reasons, but also because the “construction sites” in both the education and VET systems certainly would justify a more flexible and positive approach towards the European philosophy as VET in schools undoubtedly needs to become a central issue of the national VET policy debate. Hybridity can be seen as one tool to make VET systems more flexible, open borders between institutions and responsibilities and help young people to define their individual pathways into and beyond a vocational career. At the same time, it could also help to cope with the increasing challenges of demographic change and could also serve official government policy by “bringing” more young people into higher education. It becomes clear that our topic therefore has not just a pedagogical relevance, but also a social and economic one in the context of the current modernisation debate.