

Learning and Working Biographies from Germany – Geriatric and Health Care**Stories from Germany****Bernd**

Bernd finished school successfully after ten years of general education (level of secondary education, ISCED level 2). His teachers advised him to continue general education for a general higher education entrance qualification so he could go to University to train as a teacher in physical education and music. But Bernd decided to start a vocational training as railway mechanic, the aspect of already earning money appealed to him. But Bernd realised during his training that this profession fell short of his expectations.

After his successfully completed vocational training he decided to take the exams for a general higher education entrance qualification after all. For this purpose he took courses at a school for adult education in Magdeburg, for maintenance he applied successfully for a government grant, in his case a loan independent of the financial situation of his parents. After attaining the general higher education entrance qualification he worked for a year during his compulsory civilian service in a residential care home for the elderly. He liked working in geriatric care and he earned approval for his performance. So he decided on a three year vocational training course in order to become a state-approved elderly care nurse. For the practical part of the training he could continue working at the same residential care home.

After completing his vocational training successfully he was hired on regular terms by the same home. After some time of professional experience, Bernd realised that the work was too straining for him in the long term and the payment not well enough. In order to better himself professionally and financially he decided on further professional education.

He applied successfully at the University of Vechta for a five year full-time course of studies for a degree in gerontology. He handed in his notice and financed his maintenance with the help of another government grant.

He successfully completed his studies and continued working in the academic field on the basis of contracts for services. He also taught adult education courses in gerontology, nursing services and several other projects.

Today Bernd works as a permanent employee in a vocational school for geriatric care and is at the moment satisfied with his professional situation as it is.

Learning and Working Biographies from Germany – Geriatric and Health Care**Freya:**

“What next?” Freya asked herself after successfully attaining her general higher education entrance qualification.

She tended towards a profession in the public health sector but she did not know yet if it suited her. So she did a two month work experience at a mental institution. That was not yet enough for her, she wanted an insight into the care for the elderly because she knew there was a lot of work to be done in this field, too.

So she worked for about six month as an auxiliary caregiver for a home nursing service. After those two experiences she felt confident that a vocational training as registered nurse would suit her very well professionally. The training was easy for her though the theoretical and practical demands could also be challenging. She was very dedicated to her work as a nurse, felt comfortable, and got along very well with patients and with colleagues. But still something was missing.

She realised that she could achieve more and contribute other things to the development of the residential care home for the elderly where she worked. For six month she worked in her trained profession. Then she mustered all her courage and asked for an appointment with the directress of the care home. The interview was very encouraging. She learned that she was already recognised as a skilled employee even after her relatively short term of working there. The directress was also confident that Freya could achieve more, she advised her to enrol in a course of studies in order to take on more qualified tasks. In a more managing position she would also be able to implement the ideas she already had to better the practice of day-to-day care giving.

Freya was a bit in a quandary. On the one hand she wanted to continue working; on the other hand the idea of a course of studies tempted her, too. Again she asked herself: “What next?” She researched possible degree course schemes. One appealed to her very much, a three year degree course concluding with a bachelor thesis in public health and care management. In this course she would be able to study and to work at the same time.

Again she talked to the directress who congratulated her on her choice of studies and course organisation. She offered Freya a form of work schedule that enabled her to study and work continuously. Even more: After one year of studying, Freya was offered the position of a head of the residential part of the care home. In the last months of her studies she already filled the position head of nursing. Freya felt that she was needed and that the decision to take up a course of study after her vocational training had opened many doors professionally.

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Three month after her degree she had a baby and took one year maternal childcare leave. She knew she would still be needed afterwards. When the child was one year old, she resumed her job as head of nursing. After her managerial advancement – possible through her degree – now arose the possibility of a functional advancement of her career: Freya became quality assurance manager of the nursing home. She holds this position now already for five years and is today in her mid-thirties. She has since taken up another extra-occupational course of study to attain a Master degree in care management. She likes the idea to qualify for supervisor afterwards, for example by advanced training or a degree course in supervision and coaching.