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## **The System of Continuing Education in German VET**

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### **1 Classification of continuing vocational education and training**

Continuing education in Germany consists of vocational, general and political continuing education. An enormous diversity of institutions, providers and offers is typical of the whole area of continuing education.

Continuing vocational education and training (VET) is one of the biggest sectors within continuing education. It contains all courses and programmes leading to qualifications that intend to maintain, expand and build up vocational knowledge and skills.

Over the last ten years, in the literature and in statistics dealing with continuing VET we can find a distinction between formal and informal education and training. Formal programmes include organized seminars and courses that are, at a minimum, linked to an institution, lecturers/ trainers and a predefined schedule which lead ultimately to a formal qualification (diploma or certificate).

Informal further education subsumes all those ways of acquiring knowledge and skills which are not institutionalized, of short duration and integrated in the daily and work contexts (e.g. reading technical literature, learning through observation or experiment, attending talks and lectures and the like). Figure 1 summarises this structure.

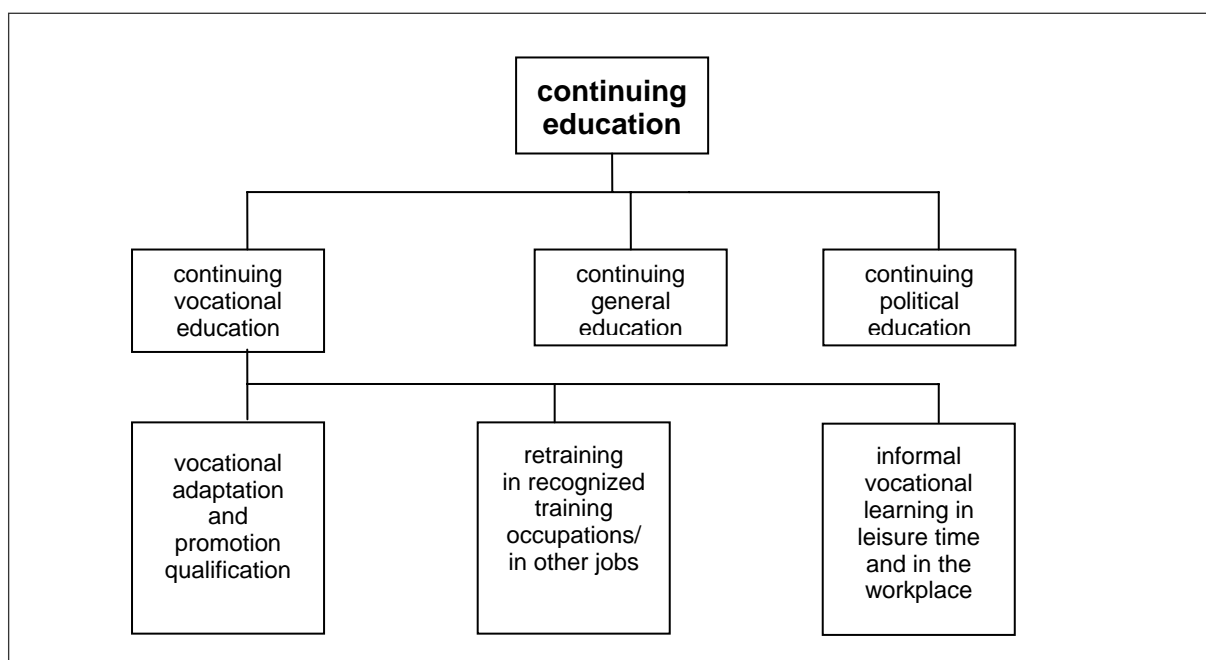


Figure 1: Continuing education in Germany

## 1.1 Formal continuing education

Following the structural plan of the German Educational Council (Deutscher Bildungsrat) of 1970, the “fourth recommendation of the Conference of Ministers of Culture on further education (2001)” defines continuing education as “the continuation or resumption of organized learning after the conclusion of an initial educational phase of varying length and usually after beginning professional or family work” (KMK 2003, 60).

Hence the term continuing education includes different areas such as adaptation qualification<sup>1</sup>, advanced training, promotion (advanced) qualification and retraining. The area of continuing education is designated the fourth pillar of the German educational system, but even in the so-called tertiary sector of vocational training, continuing vocational training takes place in school-like form, in specialized and vocational schools, in adult evening centres and universities.

Compared to other European systems, the German system of continuing vocational training is characterized by its market led approach to provision. The consequence is that there is a confusing multiplicity of institutions and offers for continuing education. The reasons for this plurality are the result of both historical and educational planning causes.

Thus, historically and in terms of terms of democracy, the protagonists of adult education in the 1920s insisted that the sector of adult education articulate as many interests as possible and that correspondingly differing providers be involved. This principle of pluralism took the place of overall regulation by the state, something which has continued to this date.

From a planning perspective, a continuing education structure characterized by diversity and competition between its suppliers and the programmes that they provide can react more rapidly to the quickly changing demands of the employment sector or compensate for the chronic co-ordination deficiencies between the educational and employment systems. This also speaks in favour of a minimal role for the state in continuing education.

The state, therefore, merely determines the principles and governs the organization and promotion of continuing education. The arrangement of continuing education largely follows the principle of “subsidiarity”. This means that the state leaves the development of continuing education to different powers in society and exhorts all those involved in the sector of continuing education to show public responsibility.

However, some suggestions have been made to increase the systematic nature and accountability of continuing education, such as developing “co-ordinating legislation”, a Federal framework, and for Federal regulations in continuing vocational training aiming at a middle course between the hitherto underdetermined continuing education “market” and a nationalization of continuing education.

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<sup>1</sup> The German term “Anpassungsfortbildung“ includes all kind of further training that intends to obtain vocational qualification, enlarge it or adapt it to technical developments.

The legal responsibilities for continuing vocational training are regulated in Germany according to the division of competences between the Federal government and the Federal states agreed upon in Constitutional Law (Art. 30, Art. 72, Art. 74 of the Constitutional Law). Different Federal and state laws are relevant to the governance of continuing vocational training. Thus, specific aspects of continuing vocational training are regulated in individual Federal laws. In a broad sense, the Vocational Education Act, for example, determines the examination modes for advanced training and retraining, the Work Promotion Act (Social Law Book III) the financing, and the Works Constitution Act or the Personnel Representation Act co-determination in the field of corporate continuing education. Whereas the Federal government regulates extra-school continuing education, legislative competence for continuing vocational training at school is in the hands of the states (Länder). The Career Advancement Further Education Promotion Act (AFBG) that took effect on 1 January 1996 aims at achieving an individual legal claim to the promotion of vocational advancement further education.

## **1.2 Informal continuing education**

The field of informal continuing education cannot be clearly differentiated from formal continuing education. The reporting system “Weiterbildung VIII” (BMBF) (2003) includes those forms that have formal character and are organized, such as those at which the place of learning and the workplace are spatially and temporally separated. Learning in the context of work plays a special role in informal continuing education. This includes conventional forms such as instruction, initial skill adaptation training and new forms like exchange programmes, job rotation, “Lernstatt”, quality circle and self-directed learning at the workplace by reading specialist literature or learning at the computer. Furthermore, information giving events (specialist talks, conferences/congresses, trade fairs, exchanges of experience and other information events) are also provided at work (cf. Arnold and Schiersmann 2004, 40).

## **2 Structure of supply and demand**

In keeping with the principle of pluralism, the structure of providers in continuing vocational training is extremely heterogeneous. Continuing vocational training is offered by employers/companies, private institutions, chambers (“Kammern”), professional associations, academies, polytechnics, technical schools, vocational schools, adult evening centres, the employers’ association, occupation co-operatives, labour unions, church institutions and correspondence schools. The literature on the subject makes different suggestions as to how this wide spectrum of providers can be categorized. Most authors differentiate between public providers not pursuing any particular interests and accessible to all (state and communal facilities); free providers (chambers, employers’ associations, professional associations, churches, labour unions), which according to their mandate offer their own continuing education activities to a defined group of persons; and private providers (companies and commercial institutions of continuing education), which work on a for profit basis. The statistical registration of the structure of providers in continuing vocational training still

proves to be a complicated undertaking. One of the reasons for this is the problem of counting because not all the providers are recorded on continuing education databases. A further reason is given by the problems of differentiation and categorization between the different providers.

The database KURS of the Federal Agency for Labour is the largest database on continuing education in Germany. It has the task of providing an overview of continuing vocational training opportunities in Germany in order to produce transparency in the continuing education market. Currently, the database contains 12,500 providers of continuing vocational training with approximately 450,000 activities (cf. BMBF 2004, 174).

As measured by the numbers participating in the year 2000, employers/companies are the most frequent providers of continuing vocational training with 53% of participants. Private institutions and chambers rank second and third with shares of 9% each (cf. BMBF 2003, 240). This ranking has remained much the same since the 1990s.

Alongside the increase in the number of providers of, continuing vocational training the range of activities has also grown in recent years with a 50% increase in the number of programmes being offered between 2001 and 2003. Of the continuing education courses recorded in KURS, 95.6% were concerned with adapting and expanding professional knowledge and skills, with 2.9% serving to promote professional advancement (see Table 1).

Table 1: **Objectives of professional continuing training**  
(source: BMBF 2004, 176)

Domains of vocational continuing training	Number and percentage of events
total number of continuing education events	450,004
continuing training for adaptation	95.6%
advanced continuing training	2.9%
<i>thereunder:</i>	
<i>graduates in business administration or of a commercial education</i>	1.2 %
<i>master craftsmen</i>	1.2%
<i>technicians</i>	0.5%
academic continuing education	1.5%

The KURS database categorizes the learning opportunities offered in adaptation continuing training into 74 main groups. In terms of popularity the first ten of these are (in rank order): data processing and informatics (24.8%), electronic data processing (EDP) applications (11.3%), leadership, labour and communications techniques (6.3%), journalism (5.7%), welding and metal joining techniques (5.2%), health care (4.7%), law (4.4%), office/administration (4.0%), finance, accounting and costing (2.5%), management, corporate representation (2.0%). All the other subject groups account for 29.2% of participants (ibid. 178).

There are no data on the subjects/learning areas of informal continuing vocational training. Only the kinds of this form of continuing education have been recorded to date. The most frequent activities in informal continuing education is headed by self-study by observation and experimentation at the workplace, closely followed by the reading of professional literature or specialist journals, short events (e.g. talks, morning seminars), and instruction/training. Those kinds connected with organizational effort (specialist visits to other departments, quality and workshop circles, “Lernstatt”, participation groups and exchange programmes) are found at the bottom end of this ranking (cf. BMBF 2003, 186).

### 3 Structure of participation

Despite numerous educational assumptions only half of the adult population participate in continuing education. The causes of this non-participation in continuing vocational training are manifold (Bolder and Hendrich 2000) including: negative experiences at school, motivational difficulties, lack of material and time resources and the anticipated inability to utilize what has been learnt. All in all, it can be ascertained that the social selectivity, which still exists in the overall system of education, cannot in effect be compensated for by the system of continuing education.

However, over the long term participation in continuing vocational training has clearly increased. According to information from different reporting systems on continuing education in Germany, participation in 2000 (see Table 2) was three times higher than in 1979<sup>2</sup> (cf. Kuwan 2004, 204).

Table 2: **Participation in continuing vocational education in Germany 1979 – 2000**  
(Source: Kuwan 2004, 204)

Types of actions/programmes	Quotas of participation (in %)							
	1979	1982	1985	1988	1991	1994	1997	2000
I took retraining into another profession/occupation with the help of courses	1	1	1	1	2	2	2	2
I participated in courses for occupational advancement	2	2	2	3	3	4	3	3
I participated in courses in the company for familiarization with a new job	3	4	3	4	4	5	6	6
I participated in courses for adaptation to new tasks in my job	-	-	-	8	10	7	12	11
I participated in other courses in my job	6	8	8	9	8	9	9	10
Participation in at least on one these measures = quota of participation in continuing training	10	12	12	18	21	24	30	29

<sup>2</sup> Persons between the ages of 19 and 64 were interviewed. The last sample comprised 7,000 cases.

The latest data on the structure of participation in continuing vocational training derive from the ongoing project of the Federal Institute for Vocational Training (BIBB) entitled „Costs and Benefits of Vocational Continuing Education for Individuals“ ("Kosten und Nutzen beruflicher Weiterbildung für Individuen"). The BIBB survey covers the totality of employable persons aged between 19 and 64. A total of 5,058 persons (net sample) were interviewed between November 2002 and May 2003 and the participation rate amounted to 39% (cf. Beicht, Schiel and Timmermann 2004, 6).

Up to now the study has been able to corroborate the traditional structural characteristics of participation in continuing vocational training: the degree of participation by adults in continuing vocational training correlates with the possession of a middle/higher certificate from schools of general education (see Figure 2).

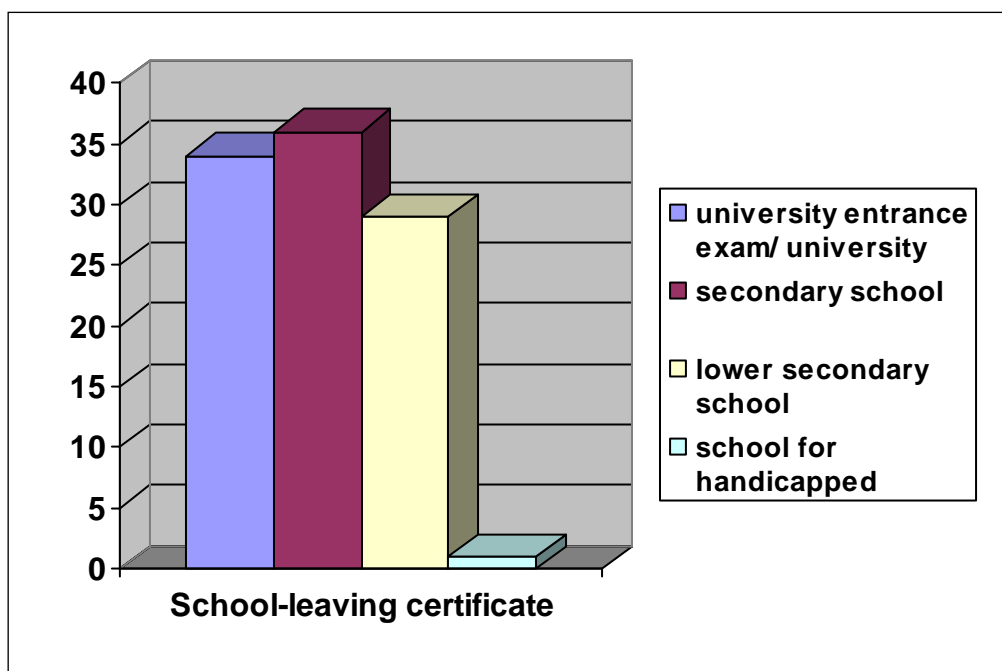


Figure 2: Participants of continuing vocational training related to school-leaving certificates, in % (Beicht, Schiel and Timmermann, 2004, 7)

An individual who completes their vocational training with a medium/high level of qualification (completion of initial vocational training, training as a master/technician and university/polytech) is likely to have a greater likelihood of subsequent participation in continuing education (94%). In addition, participants in continuing vocational training are usually fully employed (75%). Moreover, participants differ according to their professional status: with 79%, white-collar workers, civil servants and the self-employed are more strongly represented in continuing vocational training than blue-collar workers (20%).

However, these results are completely reversed when the question is posed as to the time expended by participants on continuing vocational training. According to the reporting system “Weiterbildung” (BMBF 2003), the amount of time expended in continuing education

by different types of participant differs from the participation rate of these different groups. The reason for this can be traced back to the high proportion of continuing training for the unemployed. In 2000, for instance, a participant without vocational training invested on average 259 hours on continuing vocational training. One with a university degree invested only 95 hours (BMBF 2003, 64). The time expenditure of participants with an apprenticeship was also higher than those with a university degree. Blue-collar workers spend more time as participants than white-collar workers or civil servants. Those employed in industry or the civil service spend less time as participants in continuing education than employees in other sectors of the economy. In the expenditure of time per participant, employees in small enterprises exceed those in large enterprises (cf. Kuwan 2004, 207).

Finally, the CVTS Survey (Continuing Vocational Training Survey), provides comparative information on the participation rate in different countries (Grünewald, Morall and Schönfeld 2003). With a participation rate of 36% in enterprises offering courses, Germany is in the second half of the countries covered. The Scandinavian countries (Sweden: 63%, Denmark: 55%, Finland: 54%) lead in terms of the participation rate, followed by Belgium (54%), Norway (53%), Ireland (52%), Great Britain (51%), France (51%), Czech Republic (49%), Luxembourg (48%), Italy (47%), Slovenia (46%), Portugal (45%), Netherlands (44%), Spain (44%). Austria and a number of Eastern European countries (Bulgaria, Estonia, Hungary, Lithuania, Romania and Latvia) have a lower participation rate in corporate courses than Germany (24).

## **4 Finance**

The financing of continuing vocational training as a whole is carried out by a mixture of cost sharing between private individuals, the Federal Agency for Labour, enterprises and the public authorities. The distinction between prefinancing (“who pays?”) and refinancing (“who bears the costs?”) is significant for an analysis of the financing of continuing education. This distinction results from the fact that participants, enterprises or the state can replace the expenses for continuing education by getting them back from other actors (cf. Expertenkommission 2002, 94).

No topical data are currently available. The Expert Commission on “The Financing of Lifelong Learning” (2002) arrived at the finding that with a share of over 54% and an overall budget of € 17.32 bn private enterprises represent by far the largest financing group (prefinancing). In prefinancing the Federal Agency for Labour takes a clear second position investing €6.73 bn (21%). Private individuals take third position with a share of €5.73 bn (18%) with the public authorities fourth, paying €2.22 bn (7%). It is striking that, as Figure 3 shows, the proportion of the gross domestic product being invested in continuing vocational training has declined significantly since 1986 (cf. 111).

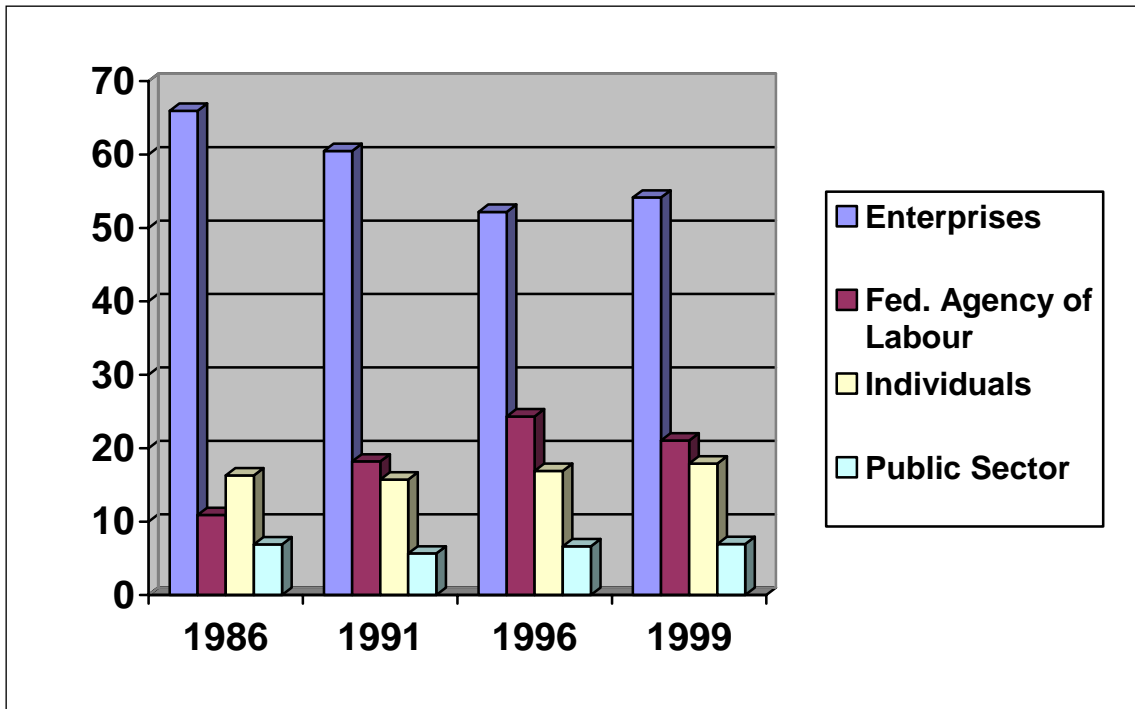


Figure 3: Total volume of prefinancing for continuing education (1987-1999), in % (Expertenkommission 2002, 111)

Those who pay for continuing education are not necessarily those who bear the costs of continuing education. Whereas the prefinancing of continuing education can be ascertained relatively easily in Germany, recording refinancing largely avoids empirical grasp. We have to resort, therefore, to considerations of plausibility in order to say something about the refinancing of continuing education. The Expert Commission assumes that the tax system (tax refunding) prevents enterprises and private persons from being burdened to the extent that the expenditure and cost surveys would suggest. However, proceeding from this assumption, a lot speaks in favour of the premise that private individuals are ultimately the financial bearers of continuing education as consumers, taxpayers and contributors to unemployment insurance (cf. 117).

## 5 Control of continuing vocational training by co-operation and networking

The existing structure of continuing vocational training leads not only to lack of transparency on the further education market, but also to fundamental difficulties in the empirical recording of the different individual aspects mentioned above. In recent years further education databases and large-scale panel studies (Bellmann 2003) have contributed towards improving the overview of continuing vocational training structures in Germany. Nevertheless, the many different databases, as well as the partial statistics, only provide a fragmentary and not an overall picture.

A further drawback of this market-like organization and the absence of an overall tax system in continuing vocational training must be seen in the fact that the numerous providers of continuing vocational training are free to act as they wish, and have no long-term obligations to co-operate. This circumstance considerably favours the lack of transparency of further education.

As a compromise between the existing market dynamism and the non-existent overall taxation of continuing vocational training, since the 1970s proposals have been submitted, both in the vocational educational and scientific discussion, that aim at improving and systematizing co-operation and networking in continuing vocational training. In the 1990s especially, the EU, the Federal government and the states provided financial grants to test and implement networks in continuing vocational training.

The key objectives of promoting the co-operation and networking of providers of continuing vocational training are: grouping resources and capacities in continuing vocational training; increasing the transparency of offers of continuing training, their services and usage by participants; increasing the quality and usability of educational offers; intensifying co-operation between education, employment and labour market policies; business development; as well as other fields of policy to promote the employability of people and permeability between the educational sectors.

To reach such and similar objectives a number of projects have been launched to implement networks in recent years. However, in relation to the expectations attached to such networks, reports on real network activity and results are scant. The number of programmatic approaches still exceeds that of empirical contributions. It is only very recently that individual reports have been published from scientific monitoring of regional further education networks (Gramlinger and Büchter 2004).

A major reason for this lack of information is due to fact that the effectiveness of co-operation and networking in continuing vocational training is difficult to ascertain empirically, not least because its effects only tend to appear long-term. In this respect there is a great need for research, in particular in view of the large budget that has been spent on promoting co-operation and networking up till now. An important question would be to what extent projects to promote co-operation and networking in continuing vocational training have contributed towards changing or improving the behaviour of participants.

## **6 The relation between vocational training and continuing vocational training**

In the debate in Germany on further education the question as to the relation between vocational training and continuing vocational training has been little heeded to date. In the additional survey to CVT II (Continuing Vocational Training Survey) (cf. Grünewald, Morall and Schönfeld 2003, 123ff.), which only collected data on corporate further education in Germany, companies were asked about their opinions on the future relation between training

and continuing training. The question was less one of regulatory and curricular integration, but rather of weighing the two areas against one another. The following picture emerged: 44% of enterprises are of the opinion that training and continuing training should be expanded in scope and content; 34% felt that continuing training should be expanded and vocational training maintained; only 16% stated that both vocational training and continuing training should be kept as they are; and merely 6% advocated only expanding vocational training and maintaining continuing training (cf. 124). These findings can be interpreted as indicating that enterprises show a clear preference for a priority use of corporate continuing training for adaptation to technical and organizational changes (cf. 123).

In the political and scientific discussion on vocational training in Germany there is widespread agreement that both fields of vocational training to promote permeability must be more strongly integrated in the educational system and lifelong learning. A number of suggestions have been made as to how this might be achieved but surveys on actual practice are still rare. However, approaches to and ideas for interlocking vocational training and continuing vocational training must take note that both areas demonstrate different structural characteristics on different levels as indicated in Table 3.

Table 3: **Structural characteristics of vocational training and continuing training**

Structural characteristics	education & training	continuing training
Legal basics	Vocational Training Act/ school laws of the countries	partial legislation, e.g. vocational training law, SGB III, Betriebsverfassungs-, Personalvertretungsgesetz
Curricular basics	curricula for recognized training occupations	only partially made-up
Provider	enterprises, inter-company training places, vocational schools	diversity of providers on the continuing training market
Addressees	adolescents	adults
Personnel	Instructors/teachers in vocational schools	trainers without specific requirements of qualifications
Finance	enterprises/state	various possibilities of finance and promotion

The proposal of the Federal Institute for Vocational Training (BIBB) suggesting an interlocking and simultaneous “dualisation” of training and continuing training including higher education is far-reaching. Conceptual evidence can also be discerned in the approaches of additional qualifications (qualifications accompanying training and leading on to continuing training) (Schiersmann, Iller and Remmele 2001).

In addition, it must be borne in mind that in practice in small and medium-sized enterprises there have long been established practices that interlock vocational training and continuing vocational training. Here training resources are an essential prerequisite for continuing training. That means that continuous training in these enterprises benefits to an extent that should not be underestimated from the demands and conditions of initial vocational training in terms of content and personnel (Büchter and Goltz 2001). However, at the moment there are few data on real practices of the integration of these two fields of vocational training. Here there is a major requirement for research.

## 7 Conclusion

Due to its historically evolved structure, continuing vocational training is a complex field in Germany. This complexity is increased by the fact that the concept of continuing education has been expanded by the empirically elusive forms of informal learning and that simultaneously more and more providers are pouring onto the further education market. "Expertisen zu den konzeptionellen Grundlagen für einen Nationalen Bildungsbericht – Berufliche Bildung und Weiterbildung/Lebenslanges Lernen" (Baethge, Buss and Lanfer 2004) provides a number of suggestions for research.

In our opinion a future focus should be placed on the following issues in particular:

- What relevance do formal and informal learning have for curricula vitae and labour market policy?
- What success in learning can be achieved by informal further education in particular?
- With what criteria are opportunities in continuing vocational training planned (who determines the needs on what basis)?
- How can groups currently not participating in education be motivated to take part in continuing vocational training?
- What financial incentives already exist in continuing vocational training and what effects of such incentives can be demonstrated on the participation structure?
- How can the effectiveness of promoting co-operation and networking in continuing vocational training be recorded empirically?
- How can training and continuing training be interlocked at the level of curriculum and content?

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