



EUROPEAN
ASSOCIATION FOR
THE EDUCATION
OF ADULTS

Country Report on Adult Education in GERMANY

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Introduction

This Report covers the situation of Adult Education and Lifelong Learning in Germany. It is divided into two sections. The section *Policy and Politics* gives an overview of the key policy currently in force, and also outlines the main legislation or political situation in the country. *Structure and Providers* gives a more detailed look at the organizational structures, and also outlines the main adult education providers, mainly looking at non-formal and informal learning.

We want to thank our members for their contributions to this reflection on the adult education situation in Germany as far as possible as of 2010/2011. Inevitably there will be new things emerging within the ever changing situation of adult education, but we believe the majority of the information provided will be relevant and useful for the foreseeable future. However, to keep the resource accurate and up to date we are open to suggestions to improve the texts. If you feel there is something you can add about your country please contact us via email at [eaea-info\[at\]eaea.org](mailto:eaea-info[at]eaea.org).



Overview

The system of adult education in Germany is difficult to summarise, due to the nature of the German system, and the way in which the country is organised. The Republic of Germany is composed of **16 federal states**, known as **Länder**, which vary in size and population. Each of these Länder defines their own priorities and goals regarding education, and therefore there is **no centralised system** for adult education. There are, however, some overarching policies which can be seen to be important to the majority of the Länder, and some common priorities. One of these common priorities, for example, can be seen as the improvement and development of the parameters for lifelong learning, to enable participation for all groups of the population. However the individual decisions and systems are entirely **dependent on the situation in the specific Länder** and particularly to the respective **legislation on further education**. [1]

Also common within Germany is the **focus on work and occupational progression** for adults, and as such certification and recognition of lifelong learning is seen as a precaution against unemployment, or a key factor in the improvement of employability. Informal learning in particular is seen as a key focus for social mobility, and necessary for adaptability in a world of challenges. Consequently there is a drive towards the **certification of non-formal and informal** learning as an incentive for people to engage more fully in society through, for example, voluntary work. [2] The development of a German national qualification framework is currently almost finalised (2011) but so far only takes into account the system of formal education in Germany. This is then creating a huge challenge, especially for non formal education providers in both youth and adult learning.

Politics and Law

As mentioned above, Germany (in accordance with the Basic Law) has a federal structure, within which both the Federation and the Länder have the quality of a state. Therefore the responsibility for creating legislation, and the administration of education, science and culture, lies with the Länder, and they are able to **enact legislation in these areas independently from the Federal Government's authority**. [3]

The Länder have power specifically in relation to general continuing education, continuing education related to school leaving certificates, continuing vocational education at trade and technical schools and continuing academic education, as well as some areas of continuing political education. On the other hand the Federation is responsible for continuing vocational education outside of the school sector, for research into continuing education, and for issues relating to



continuing education statistics. In other words, for areas which affect issues across the Länder. [4]

For other issues seen as 'cross-regional', which affect various Länder, the Federal Government can work with the Länder to agree on the **promotion of research**, and in **assessing how effective programmes are**. However, Länder can still choose to deviate from federal legislation.

The collaboration which then becomes necessary between the Federation and the Länder when they need to agree on joint aims and roles within education takes place in various different bodies. Namely these are the **Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder (KMK)** and, until 2007, in the Bund-Länder Commission for Educational Planning and Research Promotion (BLK), which was replaced by the **Joint Science Conference (GWK)** as part of the reform of Germany's federal structure. Collaboration in the Standing Conference of Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs (KMK) is a crucial element in the comparable development of education within and between the Länder. [5]

Federal Law

On a Federal level the key ministry is the **Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF)**, which is organised into eight **Directorates-General**, each of which has a different area of responsibility. The Directorates-General 3 is the one responsible for **Vocational Training and Lifelong Learning**, and is subdivided into these Directorates.

- Directorate 31 is "**Vocational Training**", concerning both training and training places, including the development of new training, and the modernisation of existing training. Regulation of qualifications in this area is also an important task of the Directorate. This includes the **Vocational Training Act** and the **Upgrading Training Assistance Act**. There is an annual Report on Vocational Education, which documents the development of both initial and continuing vocational training throughout Germany.

- Directorate 32 deals with the areas of **lifelong learning, educational research and continuing education**. Cross-sector topics, including cultural education and new media in education are also developed within this Directorate. The Directorate also manages an extensive national day school programme, and monitors international benchmark studies (e.g. PISA). The national education report is issued jointly by the Federal Government through the Directorate, and the Länder. [6]

Other key legislation includes the '**Concept for Lifelong Learning**', which was approved on the 23rd April 2008. The Concept is connected to the various



measures which have been introduced under the **Federal Government's Qualification Initiative**. These include:

- Measures to improve educational opportunities for children under six years of age,
- An extensive range of measures to improve vocational training,
- Facilitating the transition from school to higher education,
- Drawing more attention to technology and the natural sciences, and
- Improving opportunities for women. [7]

Legislation in the Länder

At the level of the Länder, their own **individual continuing education laws** are clearly particularly important. These laws outline the basic conditions which govern the level of public-sector support, and perhaps most importantly define continuing education as an area of education in its own right. They also support the existence of establishments which provide education, for instance by outlining a state recognition for them. They contain rules on the **curriculum**, required qualifications for teachers and the level of **access** for differing groups in the community.

The legal situation concerning the Länder changed in 2006 with the amendment of the Basic Law, reforming the federal structure. After this point the task of planning education was no longer a joint task between the Länder and the central Federation, and a new way of determining the performance levels of education was created, based on international standards. Therefore after the reform, the Länder's responsibilities in the area of education were strengthened significantly. Part of the current structure is now the **Joint Science Conference (GWK)**, which was formed in 2008, to help the Federation and the Länder strengthen their **co-operation** and achieve **joint goals**. Key amendments were also introduced with regard to the labour market policy, which has strengthened the way that continuing vocational training is promoted. [8]



Future trends/key concerns/directions

One interesting discussion within continuing education in Germany over the past years has been concerned with the trend towards **breaking down the boundaries of 'work' and 'life'**, or 'vocational' and 'general' education. It is somehow no longer seen as modern or desirable to see life divided into these two distinct areas, which is moving the sector towards a more holistic or flexible way of approaching adult education. The distinction remains, however, within the legislative framework where **federal responsibility lies with employment and vocational law**, whereas the **cultural and general education with the Länder**. More than this, there is also a perceived functional difference between 'vocational' and 'general' continuing education, which are seen to provide different benefits and interests. This conflict may create an interesting discussion over the coming years, and also may suggest a direction that the field will be moving towards in the future. [9] This is perhaps particularly relevant especially in the field of civic education as non-vocational education faces heavy financial cuts in the years 2011-2014, as the budget of the Federal Agency for civic education is constantly being reduced.

As mentioned in the previous section, the Federal Government approved the Concept for Lifelong Learning on 23 April 2008. Although now a few years old, the concept was based on the finding that participation in continuing education in Germany was low by international comparison, particularly with those who have a low qualification level. It set targets (to be achieved by 2015) for the participation levels of continuing education, particularly related to those with low qualification levels, and participation in informal learning. It outlined a basic structure for these achievements, including:

- Strengthening motivation to take part in educational activities,
- Facilitating access to continuing education,
- Improving the range of continuing education schemes,
- Increasing flexibility and integration between individual educational sectors,
- Improving social integration through education and the promotion of learning in civil society, and
- Intensifying knowledge and insights into the processes and effects of lifelong learning.

In this way we can see a direction towards which Germany is aiming to progress over the coming years. [10]



Structure overview

Continuing education in Germany is offered by a wide range of different providers, according to the **local situation** and different regional needs and expectations. The variety reflects the interests of the providers themselves, for example there can be private training companies with commercial interests, church based associations with social interests or adult education centres with public interests. Adult education is seen as a secondary activity in numerous other institutions and establishments, such as museums, libraries, consultancies, and in particular large enterprises which often have their own continuing education departments.

For **formal education**, evening schools and colleges (at the level of the Hauptschule, Realschule and Gymnasium) offer adults the opportunity to acquire the general leaving certificate as 'mature' students. These 'second chance' opportunities, or **second educational pathway evening classes**, are promoted and provided by various types of colleges, and aimed at students wishing to acquire the basic school certificate in adult life. Therefore, the overall structure of providers is very diverse and difficult to summarise, but includes various levels of organisations and different opportunities for the adult learner. [11]

Key Providers/Main institutions/Sources for Adult Education

The main key providers of Adult Education across Germany are:

- Trade unions,
- Company-based and commercial providers,
- Institutes of distance education (particularly in rural areas)
- Chambers of industry and commerce, and chambers of craft trades and agriculture,
- Higher education institutions (who are obliged to provide adult or continuing education under the Basic Higher Education Act)
- State sponsored education organisations,
- Religious organisations, and
- Community and voluntary initiatives and alternative groups [12]

Perhaps reflecting the **diverse and decentralised** nature of the provision of adult education in Germany (see Policy and Politics), there are also a large number of **umbrella and organisational bodies** working in the field. Some of the main providers and bodies are detailed below to give examples of these



institutions, although there are a great number of other providers within the sector which could have been included.

'Non-Formal' Learning

- Volkshochschulen (VHS) Adult Learning Centres

A key provider of non-formal adult education is the Volkshochschulen (VHS), or Adult Learning Centres. These centres aim to build on the liberal roots of the adult education system, and are located across the country with each then taking on different local or regional tasks and authority. This can either be through the backing of a regional authority or Länder, or the districts can themselves take on the legal status of a registers VHS association. Courses offered cover a variety of subjects, but tend to focus on languages, cultural, and general education. Although these non-vocational subjects have traditionally predominated, there is also now a growing interest in offering vocational education. The VHS are organised into Land-level associations at the level of the federal states, organised by the Deutscher Volkshochschul-Verband e.V. (DVV) as the federal organisation. [13]

- Church led organisations

Denominational adult education is provided across Germany by both Catholic and Protestant churches, who draw on the socially oriented liberal education movement of the 1800s. Both churches have a network of education centres, academies and rural education organisations which provide a range of generally family oriented education including 'non-religious' education, and cultural education. They can form a variety of different institutions, including adult education centres and academies, regional training centres and family training centres, and local education organisations. [14]

The Catholic Federal Association for Adult Education (Katholische Bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft für Erwachsenenbildung - KBE) is the main umbrella organisation for the Catholic run network. It currently (2011) has 750 facilities, making it one of the largest providers of adult education within the Federal Republic. [15] The Protestant church's organisational association is the **German Association for Ecumenical Adult Education (Deutsche Evangelische Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Erwachsenenbildung - DEAE)**. They work to provide education in religion and theology, as well as education based on lifestyle, civic participation, and professional development. [16]



Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs)

- dvv international

dvv international are the International Institute of the German Adult Education Association, founded in the 1970s as a non-profit and non-governmental organisation working to co-ordinate and unify the German community adult education centres, as well as institutions and associations throughout the world. The main fields in which they work are literacy and basic education, initial and continuing vocational training, migration and integration; and national, European and global adult education policy and funding. They also work with new media and materials, and in specific areas such as education equality for men and women, poverty reduction and health education. [17]

- The German Institute for Adult Education - DIE

The German Institute for Adult Education - Leibniz Centre for Lifelong Learning (DIE) works as a central forum for continuing education within the fields of science and practice. They work primarily within research, aiming to act as a 'go-between' between research and practice in adult education, promoting the development of strategies based on this research. Along with the research element they also aim to build a network, and promote international activities, for both professionals and researchers in the field. [18]

- Agentur für Erwachsenen- und Weiterbildung (The Agency of Adult and Further Education)

The Agency of Adult and Further Education is an independently organised institution for all Lower Saxon adult education institutions. It aims to strengthen the provision and co-ordination of education in the area, and to develop and apply resources in the most effective way. The Agency is also tasked with quality management, acting as a facilitator for networking, and the development of innovation at a national and international level. It is mandated to work with certain governmental tasks in these areas, including allocating public funding and monitoring expenses, evaluating projects and advising institutions and individuals working in the field. [19]

- (Deutsches Institut für Internationale Pädagogische Forschung - DIPF),

The DIPF, or the German Institute for International Pedagogical Research, works within the framework of the "Education Specialist Information Service", and co-ordinates the publishing of tasks of a number of institutions in the education sector who work with adult education and learning. The DIPF is a non-university institute, which aims to deliver a scientific infrastructure and research services to



researchers, practitioners, administrators and policy-makers in the field of education. [20]

- Association of German Educational Organisation - AdB

In 1959 the "Arbeitskreis deutscher Bildungsstätten" was founded as an independent organisation of political and civic education, mainly for youth services, but by the 1970s they had expanded to cover centres of adult education. They work with political and civic education, holding the idea of education for democracy as a key goal for adult education, and promote active citizenship, equal rights, and opportunities for marginalised sectors of society. They currently represent a wide variety of training providers, from youth centres, academies, (political) party-related foundations, to adult education centres and international centres. [21]

Vocational Institutions and career-related training

Vocational education in Germany has a key importance and is largely supported through private company training, or through trade union-organised adult education. This, in many areas, is based on the tradition of worker education. Educational associations (Bildungswerke) in the industrial sector also organise job-related and vocational training and education, primarily in co-operation with small and medium-sized enterprises. [22]

The Continuing Education and Training (CET) sector in Germany is characterised by a wide variety of providers, who work within a largely market-oriented atmosphere, with a comparatively low level of state regulation. Vocational CET is divided into company-based, and non-company, although often training combines elements of the two, for example through experience of working within a company combined with theoretical qualifications. Company-based is initiated and financed by companies in relation to their own needs, and those of their employees. Non-company normally includes general, political, and cultural continuing education, usually without formal qualifications. [23]

- *Kuratorium der Deutschen Wirtschaft für Berufsbildung (German Industry Board for Vocational Training - KWB)*

The German Industry Board for Vocational Training acts as a co-ordinator and representative of the businesses and associations working within and influenced by vocational education and training. In this Board there are a variety of organisations which are brought together, including:

- Confederation of German Employers' Associations (BDA),
- Association of German Chambers of Industry and Commerce (DIHK),



- German Retail Trade Federation (HDE),
- German Central Association of Skilled Trades (ZDH),
- Federation of German Industries (BDI),
- Federation of German Wholesale and Foreign Trade (BGA),
- Federation of German Independent Professionals (BFB) and
- German Farmer's Federation (DBV). [24]

- The Confederation of German Trade Unions (DGB)

The DGB maintains the majority of continuing vocational training. They work on the belief that employment and income should be distributed fairly, where people are given an equal chance of active employment. Vocational training thus supports this idea, as people are given the opportunity to enhance their qualifications and skills, in order to participate in working life. [25]

Universities

Universities and other higher education institutions are able to **accept non-formal learning outcomes as entry requirements** for some courses. Therefore certificates, employer references, and other evidence of applicable further education can be submitted, usually along with an interview. This is dependant to a degree on the specific conditions of the Länder the institution is situated. [26]

e-learning

In Germany, distance learning is seen a way to obtain education qualifications in the general and vocational sector, and learning for enjoyment, particular in rural areas. Distance learning is seen as a method where the teacher and student are at least 'mostly' separated from each other, and is usually carried out through the postal system or increasingly online.

The Law on the Protection of Participants in Distance Education - FernUSG applies to distance learning programmes. It stipulates that the courses must be approved by the state, although self-learning without individual control by a teacher - such as some computer-based learning - does not fall under the remit of the law. [27]

e-learning is becoming increasingly important for the modularisation of educational pathways and examinations, although this is happening at different rates across the sector and across the country. There are open universities and virtual study programmes, where the entire course is predominantly online, but there is also the smaller scale of adoption of new technology for teaching methods and tests. Some universities, such as the FH Lübeck or the distance



learning academy of Furtwangen University include online study programmes or virtual study programmes as part of their standard provision. Increasingly there are online and distance versions of CET and vocational courses, which are commercially provided for companies or individuals, and those providing preparatory courses for the acquisition of school qualifications. [28]

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