

# Problemy edukacji dorosłych w Polsce i na świecie

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## „We’re not playing against each other. We play together in pursuit of the same goal (. . .)” – Apprenticeship and works councils in SME in Germany

Nie gramy przeciwko sobie, tylko dążymy do tego samego celu (. . .) – praktyki zawodowe i rady

pracowników w MŚP w Niemczech

**Słowa kluczowe:** jakość, praktyki zawodowe, rady pracowników, system dualny, MŚP, kształcenie i szkolenie zawodowe.

**Streszczenie:** W 2017 r. 805 800 pracowników w Niemczech wyraziło zainteresowanie podjęciem szkolenia. Spośród nich prawie 65% skorzystało z kształcenia i szkoleń zawodowych (VET) w systemie dualnym. W sumie dwie trzecie osób zatrudnionych w Niemczech ukończyło dualny system kształcenia (Federalny Instytut Kształcenia i Szkolenia Zawodowego 2018). Fakt, że ponad połowa absolwentów szkół decyduje się na kształcenie i szkolenie zawodowe w ramach swojej ścieżki edukacyjnej (Federalny Instytut Kształcenia i Szkolenia Zawodowego 2015), jest również konsekwencją wysokiej jakości kształcenia i wynikających z tego dobrych perspektyw na zatrudnienie. Soskice (1994) argumentuje, że jednym z ważnych warunków wstępnych wysokiego poziomu jakości kształcenia jest współpraca, która odbywa się między właściwymi organami (głównie izbami rzemieślniczymi oraz izbami handlowo-przemysłowymi) z jednej strony a radami pracowników i handlowymi z drugiej. Kontekst ten jest powszechnie uznawany w literaturze przedmiotu, zwłaszcza w przypadku rad pracowników, na które niemieckie ustawodawstwo nakłada obowiązek zapewnienia jakości szkoleń w firmach (§§ 96–98 Ustawa o stosunkach pracy/Betriebsverfassungsgesetz, BetrVG). Jakie są czynniki decydujące o wysokiej jakości szkolenia zawodowego? Przedmiotem niniejszego artykułu jest jakość praktyk zawodowych opracowanych przez rady pracowników w małych i średnich przedsiębiorstwach (MŚP) oraz sposób, w jaki doskonałą one kwestie związane z przyuczaniem do zawodu na poziomie przedsiębiorstwa.

**Key words:** quality, apprenticeship, works councils, the dual system, SMEs, vocational education and training.

**Abstract:** 805,800 persons were recorded as being interested in entering training in Germany in 2017. Of these, just under 65 percent progressed to vocational education and training (VET) within the dual system. A total of two thirds of those in employment in Germany have completed dual VET

(Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training 2018). The fact that more than half of school leavers opt for vocational education and training as part of their educational pathway (Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training 2015) is also a consequence of the high (average) quality of training and of the resultant good prospects of employment. Soskice (1994) argues that one of the important prerequisites for the high level of training quality is the cooperation that takes place between the competent bodies (mostly chambers of crafts, chambers of commerce and industry) on the one side and the works councils and trade unions on the other. This context is widely taken as a given within the relevant literature, especially in the case of the works councils, which are accorded extensive information and participation rights for the purpose of securing quality of training at the company within the scope of the German Labour Management Relations Act (§§ 96–98 Labour Management Relations Act / Betriebsverfassungsgesetz, BetrVG). However, what are the determining factors for a high quality of apprenticeship training? The focuses of this paper are the issue of the understanding of apprenticeship training quality developed by works councils at small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and the way they contribute at company level with regard to apprenticeship training matters.

### **The significance of work-based learning (WBL) in companies: vocational education and training (VET) within the dual system in Germany**

Vocational education and training within the German dual system is characterised by its corporatist steering, its labour-market orientation and the link to the principle of the skilled occupation. At present, apprenticeship training within the German dual system is provided in 325 recognised training occupations; for the majority of these, the standard duration of training is three years. In this regard, the term “skilled occupation” describes “a universal principle for the regulation of training contents and qualification standards” (Reuling, 2000 (own trans.)). They stand for educational and employment-related constructs (Benner 1995 in Reuling 2000), which structure and regulate the labour market. The “concept of the skilled occupation” is anchored in the Vocational Training Act (Berufsbildungsgesetz, BBIG) and in the Crafts Code (Handwerksordnung, HwO) and expressed in terms of recognised training occupations. The leitmotiv of apprenticeship training in Germany, i.e. the acquisition of “occupational proficiency” (berufliche Handlungsfähigkeit), represents a concept that goes beyond the transfer of skills, knowledge and qualifications. Vocational education and apprenticeship training aims to ensure that the teaching and learning process is geared towards the attainment of all-round holistic occupational proficiency and enables the apprentices/learners to obtain a qualification in a recognised training occupation. In this work-based learning context, the learning venue of the company takes on a central function in bringing about occupational proficiency. Apprentices spend three out of five days of the week in the company and two days at a part-time vocational school. Learning within the real work process and in authentic work situations is combined with formal learning at school.

Vocational training standards thus represent a consistently defined understanding of quality pertaining to the content and institutional and organisational modalities of

such training: how, within a systematic learning process, to prepare learners for the demands of a skilled occupation in the labour market (initial vocational education and training) and/or how to examine skills acquired in the course of work for the purposes of occupational advancement (upgrading/further training). This secures legal rights for all participants in initial vocational education and training: the companies, the apprentices– and, not least, employers and customers, who can claim entitlement to performance of a defined quality.

The organisational interplay of the two learning venues is aimed at the development of technical, social and personal competences and is guaranteed by the fundamental regulatory instruments, which are the training regulations, the framework curriculum and the training profile. The draft of the training regulation (for the company-based component of the initial vocational training programme) is always developed under the coordination of the Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (Bundesinstitut für Berufsbildung, BIBB) in cooperation with the experts nominated by the top-level employers' and employees' organisations. The draft of the framework curriculum (for the school-based component of the apprenticeship training programme) is developed by the experts from Germany's federal states (Länder), which are nominated by each state's Ministry of Culture. The content and timings of these two drafts are coordinated partly by reciprocal attendance of each other's expert meetings.

Whether it is necessary to create an entirely new occupation or modernise a pre-existing occupation, and hence draft a new initial vocational training standard, depends on the evidence found regarding industry's training needs (Sections 4 and 5 of the Vocational Training Act and the Crafts Code). At an application meeting hosted by the federal ministry responsible, normally the Federal Ministry of Economics and Technology

(Bundesministerium für Wirtschaft und Technologie, BMWI), in concord with the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung, BMBF) and in consensus with the top-level organisations of the employers and employees, the respective education-policy benchmarks are specified. These form the basis for the development of draft training regulations and the coordination of these with the framework curriculum of the Secretariat of the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder (Ständige Konferenz der Kultusminister der Länder, KMK) (<https://www.bibb.de/en/42.php>).

### **Putting it into practice: Works councils as stakeholders for the assurance of training quality**

Recognised training occupations are thus the result of (tripartite) negotiation processes between the state and the social partners. They are an expression of the plurality of coordination (steering) built into the German vocational education and training system; that is to say, collective responsibility for the vocational education and training system (ownership) materialises in these standards. But do ownership

and commitment for commonly agreed vocational standards play a role on a company level? How do work councils especially in small and medium-sized companies assess the quality apprenticeship training and how do they contribute to it?

In Germany, companies with at least five employees have the statutory right to elect a representative body (works council). The proportion of staff represented by works councils in the public sector in 2016 was 91.0 percent. By way of contrast, the corresponding figure in the private sector economy was a total of 41.2 percent. The proportion of companies with a works council grows in line with size. In 2016, for example, only 9.0 percent of employees at companies with between five and 50 staff had a works council. In the case of companies with more than 50 employees, the proportion with a works council was 45 percent. A works council was in place at 88.5 percent of companies employing more than 500 staff<sup>1</sup> (Federal Statistical Office 2018). The German Labour Management Relations Act (BetrVG) grants works councils a graduated system of information, consultation, initiative and co-determination rights. With regard to training, the law stipulates that the works council has the right "to exercise co-determination in the implementation of company-based vocational education and training" (§ 98 BetrVG) and to work with the employer to promote vocational education and training.

Works councils, which are able to monitor training based on the Labour Management Relations Act (Betriebsverfassungsgesetz BetrVG) but can also exert an active influence on the funding of training emerge as stakeholders alongside training managers and apprentices. Their actions are characterised by the regulatory stipulations contained within the Labour Management Relations Act and therefore also by the conflicting relationship between mandatory requirements to act and opportunities to act (Windeler and Sydow 2001). As far as the stakeholders involved are concerned, the latter are "a constant object of informal or formal endeavours to shape training" (Schimank 2004). With regard to the investigation as to which "endeavours to shape training" works councils display in issues relating to training and in respect of the prerequisites under which this takes place, we assume that stakeholders involved in the company-based training system, and therefore also the works councils, develop an understanding of training quality that is independent of context and vested interests (Harvey & Green 2000). Works council members frequently exhibit a high degree of affinity to company-based training. This has its basis in their own occupational biography because it is likely that they themselves have completed vocational training in the dual system (Berger 2013). Studies reveal a close correlation between "psychological involvement" and "active political participation" (Cohen et al. 2001). The supposition is that works councils with a high level of affinity with company-based training on account of their own occupational biography will carry out both their protective function (facilitator) and their structural function (assurance of training quality) within this activity area.

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.destatis.de/DE/ZahlenFakten/GesamtwirtschaftUmwelt/Arbeitsmarkt/\\_Doorpage/Indikatoren\\_QualitaetDerArbe.it.html?cms\\_gtp=318944\\_slot%253D5](https://www.destatis.de/DE/ZahlenFakten/GesamtwirtschaftUmwelt/Arbeitsmarkt/_Doorpage/Indikatoren_QualitaetDerArbe.it.html?cms_gtp=318944_slot%253D5).

Despite a multitude of studies on the effects of co-determination on company participation in training (Stegmaier 2012) and on the costs of training (Kriechel et al. 2014), the question of the influence of works councils on training quality was not addressed within the scope of quantitative investigations until 2018 (Koch, Mühlemann, Pfeifer 2018). This study shows that the existence of a works council improves aspects such as the chances that trainees will be offered permanent employment and thus enhances the outcome quality of the training if they are in competition with qualified skilled workers on the external labour market.

The present paper introduces a qualitative study that used expert interviews and works council case studies as a sample base for investigating the understanding of training quality developed by works councils in SMEs, the mechanisms which bring about the causal correlations with the influence of works councils on training quality identified thus far (Koch, Mühlemann, Pfeifer 2018), and the conditions which are of relevance in this regard. The objects of the empirical investigation are the understanding of "training quality" that has been operationalised by the indicators of input (e.g. training regulations, training plan, aptitude of training staff), process (methodological and didactic implementation), output (examination success), transfer (of what has been learned to vocational practice) and outcome (sustainable usability of competencies acquired) and the actions of works councils performed within this context. Access to the field of investigation took place via a sequential mixed methods approach (Yin 2006), using expert interviews for the closer definition of hypotheses which were then examined in detail in four case studies. In methodological terms, the latter were influenced by the industrial sociology case study research approach (Pongratz, Pflüger, Trinczek 2010) and aimed to reconstruct understandings of training and quality and the social processes at the company which are of significance to securing company training quality together with the conditions governing such processes.

### **Approaching the perception of "quality" by expert interviews: "good training" = specialisation and matching**

*"Good training is relatively simple if you enjoy working with children and young people. I say children because some of my apprentices are aged 16 or 17. From my point of view, when you have someone who is effective and really reliable who can be deployed really well, this is great and also delivers an output for the company. For me personally, this creates a sort of feeling where we are able to say OK, this provides a benefit for us all" (trainer).*

The first phase of research involved conducting 13 expert discussions in six small and medium-sized companies with an average of 150 employees (including only two companies with a works council). "Experts" are understood to be persons *"who are in possession of specific knowledge of the facts and circumstances to be reconstructed"* (Gläser/Laudel 2010). In our case, these were persons with responsibility for vocational training (trainers, human resources managers), members of the works council (Betriebsrat, BR), and members of the Young People and Trainee Council (Jugend- und Ausbildungsvertretung, JAV). The issue of task performance in training matters by works councils under trade union organisation and of associated support structures

was also addressed via a meta-reflection a trade union secretary from the Metal Union (IG Metall) and one such secretary from the Union for Public Services, transport and Logistic (ver.di).

The main focus of the interviews was on the perception of apprenticeship training (How do you evaluate the apprenticeship training at this company?). This was linked in with the notion of quality (When is training "good"? What is necessary to make training "good"?). The way in which respondents saw their own function and the description of their role and tasks in training were further subjects of discussion.

Across all the company interviews, the interview partners stated indicators that they assess as being essential to the implementation of apprenticeship training at their respective companies and given the general conditions that are in place. These are related to input aspects (equipment issues, staff, execution of training), to the training process (level of assistance, measures to encourage motivation or training support measures) and to output/outcome (company and occupation-related results such as completion of training, wage prospects and chances of employment). The core of the "training quality" construct was, however, aligned to statutory norms and standards rather than being described by the interviewees in terms of requirements relating to the securing of individual quality indicators. Training quality was assumed to be in place if apprentices successfully complete training.

This means that, as a category, it equates to examination success.

#### Perceptions of training quality (example company 2): Training quality = examination success

Head of Human Resources	"Theoretically speaking, the success of training is measured by the final examination. If the final examination is good, then the training was good."
Trainer	"The main aim of training is to pass the skilled worker examination. Full stop."
Works council member (BR)	"For me, compliance with the skeleton curriculum is a fundamental prerequisite (...) as is ultimately having done everything which is important for the examination."
Young People and Trainee Council member (JAV)	"Good training allows us to grow into the basic structures and puts us in a position in which we are able to work."

The research phase comprising the expert interviews, *which was aligned towards reconstructing the "experiences, perspectives, interpretations and relevance structures"* of the respondents (Liebold & Trinczek 2008) led to the following initial evaluations.

- A majority of the respondents refer to "training quality" in terms of the underlying occupational standard, thus also alluding to the objective of vocational education and training as described in § 1 (3) of the Vocational Training Act (BBiG): *"The purpose of vocational education and training is to impart the skills, knowledge*

*and capabilities (employability skills) necessary in order to engage in a qualified occupational activity in a changing world of work within a regulated course of training. It should also enable trainees to gain the requisite occupational experience."*

- "The ability to perform vocationally" and "occupational proficiency" (berufliche Handlungsfähigkeit) describe the occupation-related outcome of training. This is directly linked with the company-related outcome of training, which can be paraphrased by the category of "attitude" (in the sense of being an individual match for the company). As the Head of Human Resources at company A puts it, this involves *"knowing how the company ticks and what is important here"*. The Head of Human Resources at company C states, *"We are seeking to strengthen internal values (...) by acting as role models (...). If we manage to do this, we will end up with a reliable and motivated member of staff who will enable us to survive against the tough competition we face."*
- "Good apprenticeship training" denotes a training organisation which is able to produce occupation-related (successful final examination) and company-related outcomes (match for the company) in an effective way against the background of specific operational requirements. Training is considered a pedagogical, educational and socialisational process within the company, which culminates in a personality which is in possession of employability skills, is a match for the company and identifies with its goals. *"Good training can be described in really simply terms. (...) it is when a reliable member of staff is produced at the end with whom we are able to work together effectively and who provides the company with an output"* (trainer at company B).

### **Case studies: Works councils as "advocats" and "firewalls" for VET**

Works councils have the statutory right to monitor in-company training, exert an influence on the way in which it is structured and thus facilitate its successful completion. The understanding of tasks and the influence brought to bear thus formed the focal point of the case studies which followed on from the expert interviews. In line with a "most diverse" approach, the case studies were conducted in various sectors (automobile supplier industry, local public transport) and in different regions (the Ruhr conurbation and non-urban areas of northern Germany). Due consideration was accorded to the characteristics of context reference, a combination of methods, multiperspectivity and openness (Pflüger et al. 2010).

The result is four case studies which encompass companies in the automotive supplier industry with 490 and 600 employees respectively and public transportation firms with 75 and 100 members of staff. In both sectors forming the object of investigation, the purpose of training is to ensure a supply of skilled workers. The constructs of training quality and of "good implementation of training" formulated in the expert interviews were confirmed in the case studies. In the companies investigated in the case studies, the understanding of "good training" was also aligned

to successful completion by trainees and thus to the training standard (recognised training occupation). This is circumscribed via the respective outcome expectations of the companies, of the staff providing training and of the works council.

Depending on the interview subject, the emphasis was on economic or individual application contexts. Whereas management tends to view the objective of training in terms of producing qualified skilled workers and employees who are a good match for the company, trainers and the works council are more likely to accentuate the integration of young people into working life.

*"One focus is certainly on taking social responsibility into account. But another aspect that is, of course, much more important for us is to train our own staff and skilled workers in particular." (Works foreman)*

*"As we have said, there are people in society who take more time to develop. That's just the way it is. Actually, the occupation of machine and plant operator is ideal for pupils with a lower level of prior learning who may need this extra development time. (...). This is*

why we have chosen this occupation. If we have people or trainees who particularly stand out and if we are able to do so, then we offer training in the occupation of industrial mechanic.

*Maybe I can turn a certain trainee into a tool maker. Anything is possible. (...). This occupation is a good match for our production operations. We can pick up pupils from the schools. That's the way it works. People also need to be accommodated." (Head of Training)*

*"There are also people who have passed the lower secondary school leaving certificate and got good marks. We have to find some way or other of integrating them into our society. They may be glad that they have completed training and are then able to install and dismantle parts, which they can earn good money doing. We have split things up by reducing the number of tool makers whilst also placing a greater emphasis on production technology and machine and plant operators. We have done this in order to retain staff and secondly to offer an opportunity to the people in our society with a lower secondary school qualification so that they can be integrated into the work process. They can also be accommodated in the occupation in which they have done their training. This approach has, of course, also allowed us to raise the quality of our production staff." (Works council chair)*

"Good training" is synonymous with the employability skills to be acquired in accordance with the Vocational Training Act. From a company point of view, it is essential that trainees learn over the course of training to integrate themselves into the firm's specific work regime and flexible working times and the respective social structure including specific work processes. The expert interviews had already indicated that works council activity in issues regarding training primarily concentrates on the areas of recruitment and subsequent permanent employment of apprentices,

i.e. on performance of statutory rights of co- determination. This is confirmed by the case studies, in which the persons interviewed do not ascribe any effectiveness to the works council with regard to the structuring of training beyond the facts and circumstances relating to mandatory co-determination. However, the institutional function of the works council (performance of statutory rights of co- determination, "secondary power") is not called into question at any of the companies. The works councils surveyed in the case studies concentrate their training-related activities on the facts and circumstances relating to co-determination statutorily made available to them. As far as training is concerned, respondents seldom report that they avail themselves of the right of initiative accorded to them. The result of company interest in "good training" (training as a means of ensuring a supply of skilled workers) and in combinations of stakeholders who work together in a spirit of trust (*"We're not playing against each other. We play together in pursuit of the same goal, which is ultimately to achieve success at the company and secure our jobs (...)"* company 1) is that works councils at the companies investigated in the case studies do not see any need to intervene in the structuring of training. This may be one reason for the prevailing opinion expressed in the interviews both from the point of view of the employers and the works council members themselves that nothing about training would change if there were no works council. The case studies give rise to the supposition that works councils exert a stronger effect on securing training supply than on quality assurance or quality improvement. In all companies surveyed, they are demonstrably shown to take on a role as "advocates" of training, both at a personal level (conflicts in the workplace) and institutionally (securing the supply of training places at the company) and to act as a "firewall" in the case of any impending reduction in or cessation of training provision.

### **Possible explanations - why do works councils tend to believe that the contribution they make towards training is small?**

All persons interviewed are of the view that the degree of influence exercised by works councils on the shaping of "good training" tends to be low. This is possibly due to the following causes.

#### **Ensuring a supply of skilled workers is the guiding principle**

In areas where companies are only able to use the labour market to a limited extent to cover their requirement for qualified skilled workers, firms which provide their own training see this as an investment in the future. This investment motive extends beyond the primary interest of the companies to use their own training activities as a vehicle to produce qualified skilled workers with employability skills to encompass the idea of acquiring staff who are socialised within the firm and have learned to adapt to the respective work regime and social structure. Training which achieves this objective is automatically deemed to be of "good" quality. If the works council is also convinced that training is firmly established in the company's tradition, they perceive very little

reason to intervene because their yardsticks and criteria for "good" training are also derived from the occupational profile or training regulations.

### **Activities are embedded within the logic underlying the way in which the company is run**

In exercising these rights and depending on their available resources, works councils exhibit a "broad and diverse understanding of their tasks [...] within company-based training which is not merely limited to a monitoring and protective function" (Berger 2013, p. 20).

They find themselves adopting a dual role. + They are the elected representative body of the employees, but are at the same time committed to working towards the company goal and to cooperating with the employer in a spirit of trust. This is framed within the logic behind running the company, an area in which works council actions exercise significant co-determination. In the medium-sized enterprises offering training which formed the object of investigation, "informal" control systems are described which are characterised by a "family-oriented" company climate in which everyone cooperates "openly and honestly" and in a "trusting and hand-in-hand manner" on training issues regardless of the hierarchy.

Management approaches in the form of familial structures superimpose themselves on the balance of power in company work relations and are scarcely any longer perceived as such in internal company communication. One conspicuous aspect here is that the works councils surveyed are thoroughly aware that they are operating within power structures. In the individual company, however, these are seen as a lesser risk to training than is the case in international companies which form part of a corporate group. By way of contrast, the persons interviewed for the SME case studies expect that it will be possible to resolve conflict via the means of direct dialogue. If issues relating to training require clarification, both trainers and trainees make tacit use of their "primary power" as qualified or prospective skilled workers which are "originally derived from the power positions of individual employees or groups of employees which have developed as a result of the nature of dependent relationships between the social parties at the company". As long as the results of this informal approach are accepted, it appears that the works council is able to waive its "secondary power" which is "based on regulations and institutions which have already been collectively won or statutorily stipulated" (Jürgens 1984, p. 61). Works councils monitor the implementation of company-based training in their capacity as internal supervisors. As long as the companies themselves have a strong vested interest in "good" training and use this to ensure that apprentices successfully complete their training, the works councils see no reason to intervene. If general company conditions remain the same, the absence of a works council would possibly also have no impact on the success of training. However, if these general conditions alter and training is jeopardised at an institutional or individual personal level, works councils make a contribution towards securing training.

## Brief outlook – the relevance of the results in an international context

Company-based employee representative bodies exist in the 28 EU member states and in Norway. The degree of influence exerted by trade unions varies. There are countries in which they do not have any further representation at company level aside from the role played in works councils. At the other end of the scale, some states make protection of worker interests the preserve of the unions. The proportion of employees organised within trade unions in the 28 EU states and in Norway differs immensely. The figure ranges from approximately 70% in Finland, Sweden and Denmark to 8% in France (HBS 2018). In light of this spread, what relevance may our results have beyond Germany?

In causative terms, the outcomes we have identified emerge from a national context and reflect the status of labour relations, of social partnership and of the training system in Germany. However, we are of the view that some of the aspects addressed in our study are worth considering outside a national framework and also provide grounds for follow-up research. The aim here is to present three points for examination in light of the results we have generated in Germany.

1. Occupations, training and quality
2. Social dialogue and social partnership
3. Company representative bodies against the background of securing a supply of skilled workers and international competition

### 1. Occupations, training, quality

Occupational standards in Germany result from (tripartite) negotiation processes between the state and the social partners. These standards are legally formalised and implemented as nationally uniform “state-recognised training occupations”. Numerous statutory norms are in place to ensure their specific realisation in the shape of training within the dual system (the Vocational Training Act, the Crafts and Trades Regulation Code, the Law for the Protection of Young People at Work and the Ordinance on Trainer Aptitude).

Quality benchmarks are created as part of the process of developing the standards. These take the form of the criteria and stipulations which apply to the final examination, which is conducted by an independent board at the conclusion of training. Quality of training is also a leading topic in Europe, where it plays a prominent part in the “European Alliance for Apprenticeship” (European Commission 2013). This alliance was founded in July 2013 on the basis of a Council Resolution adopted by all member states. It aims to bring together the key decision makers of trade and industry, the social partners, the competent bodies, the regions, training providers, and vocational schools in order to improve the quality, provision and image of training and to increase mobility of apprentices in Europe. We have demonstrated that the stakeholders at the companies forming the object of our investigations are working towards these self-same objectives. And there is more. If the high quality requirements of training are

also to be realised at a company level, crucial significance needs to be attached to the central players within the company. In our case, these are the works councils. On the European stage, very little light has thus far been cast on works councils in their capacity as promoters of training. "High-performance apprenticeships & work-based learning – 20 guiding principles" (Brussels, year not stated), a publication issued by the European Commission, shows that it is relevant to accord due European consideration to company-based representative bodies and to their specific areas of deployment for and with regard to:

"Employee organisations and trade unions play an important role in helping to ensure that apprentices' legal rights are safeguarded. Their main interest is the protection of the interests of apprentices. Supporting the quality of training is part of this activity. Being responsible for all workers, they also need to make sure that apprentices do not compete with employed workers and are not exploited as a cheap labour supply". The question as to the extent of the role that can be assumed by company-based representative bodies in the implementation of work-based learning in Europe follows on from these remarks.

## **2. Social partnership in training as a governance model**

In the dual training system in Germany, social dialogue between the representatives of both the employee and the employer ensures that occupational standards are in line with the needs of the labour market. Training contents are therefore described flexibly, and the focus is on technological, economic and societal developments within the respective sector rather than on the individual company. Institutional responsibility for the regulation of training (i.e. the development of the occupational standard) and for the securing of training quality rests primarily with the social partners. On the other hand, as we have seen, works councils are frequently only allocated the task of monitoring or calling for company compliance with regulatory stipulations. In the case of the employee representative body, such a division of labour ultimately has its basis in the institutionalisation of a tripartite training system. This enables employer associations and trade unions to act under the umbrella of the state and agree upon generally binding training contents and minimum training quality standards, ideally via dialogue conducted in a spirit of social partnership. These contents and standards are then enacted in legislation as mandatory training regulations. The institutional involvement of the social partners in the definition of training standards for company-based systems thus helps secure quality and contributes towards matching on the labour market. The social partnership approach towards training as a governance model and the various manifestations of this in different countries also form a topic for subsequent research. Business Europe makes the following remarks on the relevance of such work. "In many European countries, there is a trend towards stronger involvement of the social partners in VET. The emergence of a participatory model for governing VET in which social partners have an advisory role can be observed. However, for an apprenticeship system to flourish social

partners' engagement needs to go beyond the advisory role, 'to take part in the governance of apprenticeship systems and to contribute to the design of curricula and their adaptation over time'" (Business Europe, 2012, p. 4).

### **3. Company representative bodies against the background of securing a supply of skilled workers and international competition**

Training systems which are based on the principle of apprenticeship and involve the company as a central venue are gaining in significance in international terms. The fundamental recognition here is, "Apprenticeships as one successful form of work-based learning ease the transition from education and training to work, and evidence suggests that countries with a strong VET and apprenticeship system have lower levels of youth unemployment" (European Commission, year of publication not stated). The competitiveness of companies on the market crucially depends on their skilled workers. In our study, we have shown that "good training" can be equated with the terms of "vocational proficiency" and "matching". This combination, which aims both to impart employability skills and to facilitate integration into the company, provides the bedrock which enables skilled workers to act autonomously and independently. Works councils bring their influence to bear if they believe that these principles are in jeopardy. This makes an essential contribution to integrating apprentices into a company in respect of skills and socialisation. Any successful further development of apprenticeship approaches in the relevant countries will need to take account of the role of the social partners and in doing so must not merely accord consideration to the employers' associations. An inventory of existing social dialogue approaches and of the role of the trade unions in the respective national training systems could allow the opportunities for the further development of existing social dialogue approaches to be explored and could permit the identification of good-practice models for their initiation. A fundamental distinction would need to be drawn in this regard between relationships and negotiation processes at the micro level (between company management and company-based employee representative bodies), at the meso level (between sectoral employer and employee organisations) and at the macro level (between employer and employee organisations and the important state authorities) (cf. Streeck et al. 1987).

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