

# **The Education System in the Federal Republic of Germany 2019/2020**

**A description of the responsibilities, structures and  
developments in education policy for the exchange of information in Europe**

– EXCERPT –

## **8. ADULT EDUCATION AND TRAINING**

### **8.1. Introduction**

Continuing education and further learning are becoming increasingly important with the present demographic development. In terms of lifelong learning, institutionalised continuing vocational training addresses the further development of individual qualifications as well as individual reorientation relative to the qualification. The development, recognition and certification of competences will become more and more important in future, as will new, non-formal learning. Continuing education encompasses the general, vocational and socio-political domains in equal measure. Their interactions are on the increase, particularly in view of the development and transfer of competences in the sense of lifelong further learning.

In response to the vast range of demands made on continuing education, a differentiated structure has been developed. Adult and continuing education institutions offer a variety of courses and subject areas covering general, vocational, political and continuing academic education. The aims, content and duration of courses vary accordingly.

### **8.2. Distribution of Responsibilities**

Continuing education in Germany is regulated by the state to a lesser degree than other areas of education. The justification given for this is that the diverse and rapidly-changing demands on continuing education can best be met by a structure which is characterised by diversity and competition among the institutions and the range of courses and services on offer. A central principle of continuing education courses is that attendance should be voluntary.

The activities of the state in the field of continuing education are, for the most part, restricted to laying down principles and to issuing regulations relating to organisation and financing. Such principles and regulations are enshrined in the legislation of the Federal Government and the Länder. State regulations are aimed at establishing general conditions for the optimum development of the contribution of continuing education to lifelong learning.

The joint responsibilities of the Federation and the Länder include research and pilot schemes in all sectors of continuing education. In addition, Federation and Länder are responsible for statistics on continuing education and for drawing up reports on continuing education in their respective areas of responsibility.

The responsibilities of the Länder include in particular the following powers to regulate and promote:

- continuing general education
- continuing education leading to school-leaving qualifications
- continuing academic education at higher education institutions
- continuing cultural education
- some elements of continuing political education
- some elements of continuing vocational training

The prerequisites and principles for the promotion and funding of continuing education are laid down in continuing education legislation (R170–183) and employment release legislation (R184–194) of the Länder. Continuing and adult education

legislation describes continuing education as an independent education sector which incorporates continuing general and political education and continuing vocational training and the development of which is the responsibility of the public sector. Continuing education legislation guarantees a diverse range of institutions maintained by a variety of organisations and lays down a state approval procedure for such institutions. All Land legislation includes regulations which recognise the maintaining body's freedom to prepare curricula and independence in staff selection.

In addition to continuing education legislation, school legislation at Land level (R86–103) contains regulations on continuing education within the school system (e.g. the attainment of school-leaving qualifications) and higher education legislation (R129–144) regulates the development of academic continuing education. Regulations regarding continuing education offers at *Berufsakademien* are contained, if necessary, in the *Berufsakademie* legislation (R148–153).

In 11 of the 16 Länder legislation allows employees to attend continuing education courses (paid educational leave – *Bildungsurlaub*, *Bildungsfreistellung* or *Bildungszeit*) for several working days per year (usually five) with no loss in earnings, provided that certain conditions are fulfilled.

Over the past years, the Länder have encouraged innovative offers and developed numerous programmes to support further education and training that take into account the various aspects of the demand for continuing education on regional labour markets and the increased importance of professional and vocational continuing education. Special attention is hereby paid to less qualified, as well as educationally deprived persons, and older employees.

In addition to the above-mentioned responsibilities, which are carried jointly by the Federation and the Länder, the FEDERAL GOVERNMENT'S responsibilities include in particular:

- continuing vocational training outside the school sector
- regulated further vocational training
- basic regulations for the protection of those on distance learning courses which are offered under private law
- some areas of continuing political education
- international cooperation in continuing education, including within the European Union

Regulations for the continuing education sector have been adopted at national level in the following legislation in particular: the Social Security Code III (*Drittes Buch Sozialgesetzbuch – Arbeitsförderung – R164*), Upgrading Training Assistance Act (*Gesetz zur Förderung der beruflichen Aufstiegsfortbildung – AFBG – R167*), Vocational Training Act (*Berufsbildungsgesetz – BBiG – R81*), Handicrafts Code (*Handwerksordnung – HwO – R82*), Federal Training Assistance Act (*Bundesausbildungsförderungsgesetz – BAföG – R83*) and Law on the Protection of Participants in Distance Education (*Fernunterrichtsschutzgesetz – FernUSG – R166*).

The responsibility for the promotion of continuing vocational training according to the Federal Government's Social Security Code III lies with the Federal Employment Agency (*Bundesagentur für Arbeit – BA*), and the responsibility for supporting benefit recipients in accordance with the Social Security Code II (*Zweites Buch*

*Sozialgesetzbuch – Grundsicherung für Arbeitsuchende – R165*) with the Jobcenters. Promotion under Social Security Codes III and II includes the following measures:

- Further vocational training: schemes to assess, maintain, extend or adapt the vocational knowledge and skills of adults who have a vocational qualification or appropriate work experience.
- Vocational retraining leading to a qualification in a *anerkannter Ausbildungsberuf* (recognised occupation requiring formal training): targeted mainly at unemployed people with no vocational qualifications and low-skilled persons.

Through the Upgrade Training Assistance Act participants in vocational upgrade training schemes, for example to a *Meister, Fachwirt, Techniker* or *Erzieher*, have received financial support since 1996. They receive an amount to help cover the costs of the continuing education irrespective of their income, and in the event of full-time schemes they also receive an amount for their costs of living depending on their income. This grant is partly a subsidy and partly a low-interest loan provided by the Reconstruction Loan Corporation (*Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau – KfW*). In 2018 there were around 167,000 persons who received this grant. From 1996 to 2018, around 2.8 million people have been able to upgrade their training for a total cost of around Euro 9.2 billion. The AFBG is thus the biggest and most successful instrument of funding for continuing vocational education.

Under the Vocational Training Act and the Handicrafts Code, responsibility for examinations in further vocational training generally rests with the chambers (e.g. chambers of handicrafts and chambers of industry and commerce). Where there is a national regulatory interest, examinations in further vocational training are regulated by ordinances of the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (*Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung – BMBF*). The content of examinations is laid down by regulations of the *competent bodies* or by ordinances passed by the Federal Government. Further vocational training allows, amongst other things, the attainment of the vocational knowledge, skills and competences that enable individuals to assume middle and sometimes also higher management responsibilities within companies.

The Federation and Länder cooperate in various projects to secure the profits of life-long learning for the design of individual educational and working lives. The key focus is in the topics basic education, competence balancing, quality management, networking and counselling as well as municipal education management.

### **8.3. Developments and Current Policy Priorities**

The original objective of *learning for learning's sake* increasingly gave way to the task of responding to the educational needs arising from the demands of the state, society and industry. Since 1970, a more vocational slant, an emphasis on formal qualifications, systematisation and a new understanding of continuing education have been gaining importance.

With regard to the further development of the sector of continuing education within the scope of life-accompanying learning, the aim is to provide a foundation for the individual to

- develop the willingness for life-accompanying learning
- acquire the competences necessary for lifelong learning

- use institutionalised as well as new possibilities for learning in his or her life and work

Guiding ideas are

- reinforcement of self-responsibility and self-guidance
- redress of unequal opportunities
- cooperation between providers of education and users
- reinforcement of the relations between all sectors of education

In June 2019, the Federal Government, the Länder, the social partners and the Federal Employment Agency (*Bundesagentur für Arbeit – BA*) adopted a National Continuing Education Strategy (*Nationale Weiterbildungsstrategie*). The strategy, which focuses on continuing vocational training, is intended to make a significant contribution to enabling both individuals and society to successfully cope with structural change and new challenges (e.g. automation, digitisation). The aim is to make further training courses and funding opportunities more transparent and more easily accessible for all in order to provide targeted support for groups of people with previously below-average participation in further training or for small and medium-sized enterprises without large personnel departments.

#### **8.4. Main Providers**

Continuing education is offered by municipal institutions, in particular *Volks-hochschulen*, as well as by private institutions, church institutions, the trade unions, the various chambers of industry and commerce, political parties and associations, companies and public authorities, family education centres, academies, *Fachschulen*, institutions of higher education and distance learning institutions. Radio and television companies also provide continuing education programmes.

Under various continuing education legislation of some Länder (R170–183), it is mainly the task of the VOLKSHOCHSCHULEN, the local adult education centres, but also of other maintaining bodies from the private sector, to take care of basic provision of continuing education courses in the field of general continuing education, in other words to provide a regular and comprehensive range of courses which meets the most diverse social requirements and individual needs.

The Federal Agency for Civic Education (*Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung*) and the respective bodies of the Länder hold events in the field of continuing political education and promote private sponsors of continuing political education.

It is usually possible to acquire school-leaving qualifications later in life at evening classes (*Abendhauptschulen, Abendrealschulen, Abendgymnasien*) and in what is called *Kollegs*. *Abendhauptschulen* prepare adults in a one-year course (two semesters) for the acquisition of the *Hauptschulabschluss*. *Abendrealschulen* take adults through to the *Mittlerer Schulabschluss* in evening classes (four semesters). *Abendgymnasien* allow suitably capable adults to obtain the *Hochschulreife* (higher education entrance qualification) usually in a three-year period. *Kollegs* are full-time schools where adults can obtain the *Hochschulreife*.

The Länder and maintaining bodies from the private sector offer qualification courses for young people and adults to obtain school-leaving certificates. These measures are designed to give young people with migrant backgrounds in particular the opportunity to obtain a school-leaving certificate.

As institutions of continuing vocational training, FACHSCHULEN offer courses lasting between one and three years (see chapter 7 for a more detailed description of this institution).

DISTANCE LEARNING offers adults in employment the opportunity to take up continuing education on a flexible basis while remaining in employment. Distance learning courses offered by private organisations have required state approval in the Federal Republic of Germany since 1 January 1977 under the Law on the Protection of Participants in Distance Education (*Fernunterrichtsschutzgesetz* – R166). The decision to approve a distance learning course is taken by the Central Office for Distance Learning (*Staatliche Zentralstelle für Fernunterricht* – ZFU) of the Länder of the Federal Republic of Germany. Under an approval procedure checks are carried out not only on the factual and didactic quality of the teaching material in relation to the course objective, but also on advertising and on the form and content of the distance learning agreement which has to be concluded between the student and the distance learning institute. In total over 150,000 people were registered on distance learning courses in 2017.

Provided that the *Berufsakademie* laws at Land level contain the necessary provisions, the BERUFSAKADEMIEN may also offer continuing education courses.

According to the Framework Act for Higher Education (*Hochschulrahmengesetz* – R123) and the legislation on higher education of the Länder (*Hochschulgesetze* – R129–144), in addition to providing research, teaching and study courses, the main responsibilities of higher education institutions is to provide continuing education in the academic and creative field. Continuing education courses offer people the opportunity to specialise, to extend existing knowledge or to obtain an additional vocational qualification. Courses last from a few weeks or months to several semesters, with modular courses also being offered increasingly in the area of continuing education. Through continuing academic education, higher education institutions also contribute to regional development in cooperation with partners from industry.

## 8.5. Main Types of Provision

### Provision to Raise Achievement in Basic Skills

In November 2016, the Federation and Länder proclaimed the National Decade of Literacy and Basic Education 2016–2026 (*Nationale Dekade für Alphabetisierung und Grundbildung*), which takes up the findings and results of the “National Strategy for Literacy and Basic Education of Adults 2012–2016” (*Nationale Strategie für Alphabetisierung und Grundbildung Erwachsener*) that was launched in 2012. As a broad social alliance, the strategy includes, among others, the local authorities (*Kommunen*), trade unions, churches, the Federal Employment Agency (*Bundesagentur für Arbeit* – BA) and *Volkshochschule* associations. The goal of the National Decade is to raise the reading and writing skills as well as the level of basic education amongst adults in Germany. Increasing the number of participants in corresponding educational measures is seen as one of the key factors for its success. Another central goal is to expand research into the field of functional illiteracy. Its causes and distribution will be investigated more thoroughly so that it can be tackled in a preventive manner too. These and other recommendations for action were agreed in a position paper worked out by all of the protagonists involved, which was unanimously resolved by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (*Bundesministerium für Bildung und*

*Forschung* – BMBF) and the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs (*Kultusministerkonferenz* – KMK).

The Standing Conference published the final report on the National Strategy for Literacy and Basic Education of Adults in May 2017. The report indicates that over the past few years, the Länder have created new funding areas to improve the reading and writing skills of functional illiterates and encourage their basic education. Moreover, providers of continuing education and training were able to develop new learning offers with the grants. The expansion of coordination offices and local basic education centres in which contacts can be established to companies and associations as well as job centres and local government was promoted so that people with reading or writing problems can be reached more easily.

The BMBF will support the Decade's coordination office at the Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (*Bundesinstitut für Berufsbildung* – BIBB) as well as innovative literacy projects with around Euro 19 million each year, develop new course concepts, create flexible self-learning opportunities as well as extend and carry out schemes to sensitise the general public. At the same time, the BMBF supports the various activities of the Länder in the field of basic education within the scope of its responsibility. Together with corresponding partners such as the Federal Employment Agency or the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees, the Länder are planning to develop and extend offers for migrants, from literacy through to vocational qualifications.

In the funding priority "Lifeworld-oriented development projects in adult literacy and basic education" (*Lebensweltlich orientierte Entwicklungsvorhaben in der Alphabetisierung und Grundbildung Erwachsener*'), which the BMBF has been developing since 2018 as part of the National Decade for Literacy and Basic Education 2016-2026 (*Nationale Dekade für Alphabetisierung und Grundbildung 2016–2026*), 20 projects with a total funding volume of Euro 18 million are being funded. These projects will design and implement new counselling services that make use of socio-spatial access. The BMBF also supports 24 projects on the transfer of proven practices. The key topics of the transfer projects are:

- Learning offers that are adapted to the specific needs and requirements of individual working environments,
- Learning offers in the respective lifeworlds of the affected parties (e.g. in the field of basic financial education),
- Individual address, sensitisation and motivation of the affected parties,
- Sensitisation, information and training relating to the environment (private and professional), and in particular the responsible parties and superiors in a company,
- Networking to expand and exchange suitable offers,
- Quality assurance in teaching as well as the professionalisation of the educational personnel.

## **Provision to Achieve a Recognised Qualification during Adulthood**

### **Admission requirements**

Applicants for evening classes for the acquisition of a higher education entrance qualification (*Abendgymnasien*) must provide evidence of a vocational qualification or evidence that they have been in employment for at least two years. They must also

be at least 19 years of age in the school year in which they enrol and have obtained the *Mittlerer Schulabschluss*. Applicants who cannot provide evidence of the *Mittlerer Schulabschluss* or an equivalent qualification have to complete at least a half-year preliminary course teaching mainly German, a foreign language and mathematics. The Länder may adopt special provisions on examinations for admission to and on the qualification for the preliminary course. Course members must be in employment except during the last three half-years. The admission conditions for *Kollegs* are the same as for *Abendgymnasien*. Those attending such schools are not allowed to combine their study with work.

Applicants will be admitted to *Abendrealschulen* (evening secondary schools leading to intermediate qualification) who are employed at the time of their admission or were employed for at least six months, who have successfully completed the educational programme at a *Hauptschule* or compulsory full-time schooling and have reached the age of 18.

Applicants will be admitted to *Abendhauptschulen* (evening secondary schools leading to intermediate qualification) who are employed at the time of their admission or were employed for at least six months, who have completed compulsory full-time schooling and are not yet in possession of the envisaged qualification or an equivalent qualification and have reached the age of 18.

### **Learner assessment/progression**

The principles and objectives for the assessment of performance and the examinations in courses leading to school qualifications are comparable to those that apply in the secondary sector.

### **Certification**

For information about how adults can attain school-leaving certificates through the so-called *Zweiter Bildungsweg* (second-chance education), i.e. evening classes and *Kollegs*, see chapter 8.2. The *Volkshochschulen* also offer courses in this area.

### **Provision Targeting the Transition to the Labour Market**

In principle, the participation in continuing vocational education programmes can be sponsored by the Federal Employment Agency if the provider of continuing education and training is certified, the participants satisfy the individual conditions for the support and a *Bildungsgutschein* (training voucher) has been issued to the participants before the continuing vocational education programme. The costs of continuing education subsidised by the Employment Agency include, for example, the costs of the classes, travelling expenses, possibly costs of accommodation and meals as well as child care costs. Continuing education can only be subsidised if it is necessary to achieve vocational integration in the event of unemployment or to ward off the threat of unemployment. In addition, the necessity on account of a missing vocational qualification can be recognised.

Prior counselling from the Employment Agency is always required to clarify the individual eligibility conditions.



## **Provision of Liberal (Popular) Adult Education**

### **Admission requirements**

In terms of size general and political further education remains an important continuing education sector with an especially broad range of subjects. There are usually no entry requirements for continuing general and political further education courses.

### **Teaching Methods and Approaches**

As in the school sector, the teaching staff take responsibility for teaching in their classes, taking the background and aptitude of each participant into consideration.

The use of new information and communication technologies as an effective tool in self-organised learning is also becoming an increasingly important aspect of adult education/continuing education. The majority of distance learning offers are supported online, either in full or in part. Many initiatives and projects have been launched to promote the use of these technologies.

## **Other Types of Publicly Supported Provision for Adult Learners**

### **Continuing vocational education and training**

#### **Admission Requirements**

Continuing vocational education and training is targeted at groups with the widest possible range of educational qualifications, from unemployed people with no school-leaving or vocational qualifications to executives.

#### **Certification**

Only some of the courses for continuing vocational training are designed to lead to qualifications which are recognised by law or awarded by industry's self-governing organisations (chambers).

### **Continuing education in the academic and creative field**

#### **Admission requirements**

The entry requirement for continuing education in the academic and creative field at higher education institutions is usually that participants have a degree, though sometimes continuing education courses are also open to applicants who have achieved the necessary skills through a period of employment or another means (see also chapter 7.3.1.). Master's study courses providing further education require, as a rule, a first higher education degree followed by relevant skilled work experience of at least one year.

#### **Learner assessment/progression**

For study courses providing continuing education in the academic and creative field which lead to a higher education degree, the observations on the first cycle programmes in chapter 7 apply.

#### **Certification**

Continuing education in the academic and creative field leads to certificates and, in the case of study courses, higher education degrees as well.

## 8.6. Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning

The recording and certification of vocationally-relevant competences is particularly important when it comes to improving the chances for every single individual. The Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) also set up the study group “Validation of non-formal and informal learning” in 2013 in the light of the recommendation of the EU Council from December 2012 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning. The study group, which has discontinued its work in 2018, was made up of all relevant partners from the Federation and Länder, of employer and employee organisations as well as further experts.

In November 2015, the BMBF together with the Association of German Chambers of Commerce and Industry (*Deutscher Industrie- und Handelskammertag – DIHK*) and the *German Confederation of Skilled Crafts (Zentralverband des Deutschen Handwerks – ZDH)* agreed on the pilot initiative ValiKom to test the prospects of persons without formal qualifications on the labour market. To this end, the initiative, with the cooperation of eight selected chambers, develops and tests standards, methods and instruments to identify and confirm vocationally-relevant competences. At the same time, the project is open to lateral entrants with atypical education and employment biographies looking for a regulated continuing vocational education. ValiKom is also of interest to refugees with no vocational qualification.

One of the tasks of the initiative is the development of an action plan with process description, admission criteria, instruments, validation certificate and recommendations. From the end of 2018, ValiKom-Transfer will extend the validation procedures to other chambers of industry and commerce, chambers of skilled trades and, for the first time, chambers of agriculture and professions. At the end of the project period, validation procedures will be offered for around 30 occupations. On the basis of the results of the transfer initiative, possibilities and variants of a legal anchoring of a validation procedure are to be examined. ValiKom thus makes a contribution to the Council's recommendations on the "Validation of non-formal and informal learning" of December 2012.