Key elements of Germany's apprenticeship system – The so-called dual system

1. Learning in company and school

The German 'dual system' is an alternate training scheme, combining company-based and school-based learning. Apprentices-to-be are closing a training contract with a company providing the practical training. The relevant theoretical knowledge is acquired at part-time public vocational schools. Apprentices spend approximately 70% of the learning time in the company.

2. Training on the basis of state-recognized occupations

Main goal of dual training is the acquisition of the relevant skills and knowledge in order to practise the particular occupation chosen by the apprentice. 'Dual system' is providing a wide range of roundabout 340 state-recognized occupations, among them 130 in skilled crafts. Every occupation is based on a training regulation (Ausbildungsordnung) that defines the content and the duration of the training as well as basic parameters of the examination. The duration of training usually varies between 3 to 3.5 years.

3. High relevance for the labour market

The training regulations and curricula of the different occupations have a nationwide validity upon which employers can rely when recruiting new staff. Regulations and curricula are worked out and regularly modified by professional experts nominated by the social partners, taking into account changing occupational practices, state-of-the-art technologies as well as economic and social developments. This ensures a close linkage to the current and future needs of the economy.

4. Guidance and support for companies

The 'dual system' is not a fast-selling item. Companies need a high degree of guidance and support concerning the successful planning, organization and evaluation of apprenticeship training. Chambers offer a wide range of services which even enables micro companies in participating in dual training. They also keep registers of apprenticeship contracts, supervise the training, check the suitability of companies and the quality of trainers.

5. Qualification of trainers

An important pillar for successful worked-based learning is the quality of the trainers in the companies. Thus future trainers have to pass successfully the trainer aptitude examination, where they have to demonstrate their ability to plan, organize, conduct and assess training in the company.

6. Inter-company training ensures high quality

In skilled crafts vocational training is supplemented by so-called inter-company training, provided by the training centres of the chambers or professional associations. As 'third learning environment' this kind of training is focussing on those learning outcomes, which cannot be imparted by all companies, especially the highly specialized ones. That way inter-company training ensures common training standards and makes a significant contribution to quality assurance in worked based learning.

7. External examination as a seal of quality

Apprenticeship training is completed by a final examination, conducted by the chambers as competent bodies on the basis of federal standards. Members of the examination committee are experienced practitioners from the companies as well as teachers from vocational schools. Thus assessment of apprentices is carried out by external experts: a principle which guarantees objectiveness. Examination leads to a chamber certificate having a high reputation on the labour market – and in society.

8. Promotion of life long learning

Apprenticeship training is not a dead end street. Graduates have the possibility to start courses of high-level further vocational training, such as the 'Meister'-qualification or academic studies. Another option is so-called 'dual studies', a combination of apprenticeship training and academic study.