Career guidance and counselling services

Germany has a broad variety of labour market policy instruments that can be used to implement the key recommendations of the EU Youth Guarantee [1]. The recommendations suggested have largely been taken up and implemented. See also the assessment of the Youth Guarantee implementation in Germany [2] (May 2018).

Main providers and partnerships

Programmes and schemes for career guidance and counselling are legal services anchored in Book III Social Code (Sozialgesetzbuch [3], SGB III [4]). They already take place during schooling and continue when young people leave school. In addition to schools, employment agencies (Agenturen für Arbeit) are the most frequently used places for young people who would like career guidance and counselling. These services are provided as group services for school classes as well as personal advice for individuals.

Employment agencies work together with professional bodies and businesses to give young people an insight into working life, for example with work placements for year 9s and 10s [1].

The federal states (Länder) ensure that programmes and schemes offering career guidance and help with the transition from school to work are properly coordinated in their region. The Federal government and the Federal Employment Agency (Bundesagentur für Arbeit [5]) support the Länder and local authorities in improving and extending partnerships between schools, employment agencies, job centers and youth welfare organisations.

Young people can also visit the job information centres (Berufsinformationszentren [6]) run by the employment agencies. Some centres also offer an online chat service. They offer personal counselling
for the under-25s. The agencies also organise events (talks, fairs, information events), where young people can learn about career opportunities.

**Online counselling services**

The Federal Employment Agency (Bundesagentur für Arbeit, BA) and the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung, BMBF) provide online career counselling services:

- **planet-beruf.de** – A BA website on topics relating to career choice, applications and training. For lower secondary school pupils aged 13 to 17 years.
- **abi.de** – A BA website on university studies, vocational training and careers after gaining an Abitur university entrance qualification.
- **berufe.tv** – A video portal provided by BA with over 300 short films on apprenticed professions and study careers.
- **berufsfeld-info.de** – A BA service offering information on all sorts of careers.
- **Typisch ich** (Typically Me) (2016) – A BA website to help young men and women to overcome stereotypes when choosing their careers, to listen to their strengths and interests, and to follow their own path.
- **Studienabbruch – und dann?** (dropping out of studies – what happens next?) – A portal provided by BMBF with information for students who are questioning their choices on training options both within and outside of universities as well as information and support services for students who want to change their course of studies, drop out of university and enter vocational training.

**Federal government initiatives and campaigns**

The Initiative on Educational Chains (Initiative Bildungsketten) is a joint initiative of the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (Bundesministerium für Arbeit und Soziales, BMAS) and the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung, BMBF). Young people are given support on their journey to employment. The aim is to guide every young individual who is ready and old enough to start an apprenticeship through (ideally) to the successful completion of their training. Various promotional tools are available across Germany: analysis of potential, career guidance, mentoring the transition into work, voluntary coaching (the VerA initiative to reduce the apprenticeship drop-out risk) and schemes for the transition from school to work. Agreements have already been signed with the federal states, including Hamburg, Hesse, Rhineland-Palatinate and North Rhine-Westphalia. See also Integration of Young People in the Labour Market > Youth employment measures.

The Vocational Orientation Programme (Berufsorientierungsprogramm) is part of Initiative Bildungsketten (since 2008). This programme is mainly for school pupils in years 7 and 8. They can test their strengths at this age using the tool for analysing potential. Then, they try out different occupational fields. Since the start of the programme until May 2019, more than 600 million euros in funding had been awarded. Between 2008 and summer 2020, the programme will reach almost 1.5 million school pupils. Funding 2018: 77 million euros.

The Girls' Day (funded by BMFSFJ and BMBF) and the Boys' Day (funded by BMFSFJ) are nationwide career guidance days offering career guidance and help with future plans for girls and boys in year 5 and above respectively. Funding Girls' Day 2017 to 2020: 1.8 million euros. Funding Boys’Day 2017 to 2020: 1.9 million euros.
Career guidance initiatives in the federal states (Länder)

North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW) has started an initiative called No school-leaving certificate without future prospects (Kein Abschluss ohne Anschluss [22], KAoA) to offer specific help for young people transitioning from school to work. As of 2012, school pupils in NRW can access career guidance services that include analyses of their potential, introductions to occupational fields and practical placements. In the 2016/2017 school year, the initiative will reach all year 8s. That's around 175,000 young people across NRW in this school year.

'BRAFO - Choosing the right career at an early stage' (BRAFO – Berufswahl richtig angehen frühzeitig orientieren [23]) is a joint initiative in Saxony-Anhalt of the State of Saxony-Anhalt and the regional directorate for Saxony-Anhalt/Thuringia of the Federal Employment Agency (Regionaldirektion Sachsen-Anhalt/Thüringen der Bundesagentur für Arbeit). It promotes early career choice among year 7s and 8s at secondary schools, comprehensives and schools for children with learning difficulties.

'SCHAU REIN! – Die Woche der offenen Unternehmen' [24] is Saxony's largest initiative for hands-on career orientation. It encourages pupils in grade 7 and above to choose their preferred occupation and is an opportunity for them to meet face to face with apprentices and employees. It is supported by the Free State of Saxony, the regional directorate for Saxony of the Federal Employment Agency (Regionaldirektion Sachsen der Bundesagentur für Arbeit), the Saxon Chamber of Industry and Commerce (Landesarbeitsgemeinschaft der Industrie- und Handelskammern im Freistaat Sachsen) and the Saxon chambers of crafts and trades (Sächsischer Handwerkstag).

The Future Day (Zukunftstag [25]) for girls and boys in the state of Brandenburg is a one-day hands-on opportunity to get advice on a career or university degree. Pupils in grades 7 to 10 spend one day getting to know various occupations. The programme is funded by the state of Brandenburg, specifically the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Health, Women and Family (Ministerium für Arbeit, Soziales, Gesundheit, Frauen und Familie) and the European Social Fund (ESF).

The career orientation project BOGEN [26] in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania develops and designs models for gender-reflected career and university degree guidance that go beyond the Girls' Day and Boys' Day events in the state. The programme is funded by the state of Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, specifically the Ministry of Social Affairs, Integration and Equality (Ministerium für Soziales, Integration und Gleichstellung) and the European Social Fund (ESF).

Main user of services / target groups

Career guidance and counselling services are open to all young people. The vocational guidance experts at the employment agencies advise pupils from all types of school as well as apprentices, students and university graduates.

Special target groups: NEETs, young migrants/young people from a migrant background (Migrationshintergrund [3]), young refugees, young people from the lower social strata [without or with a (poor) completed lower-level secondary school education (Hauptschulabschluss [3])], from disadvantaged families, young people with disabilities and special educational needs.

Funding

There are several ministries at federal and regional level that provide funding for career guidance and counselling as described above [27]. Financial means from the European Social Fund (ESF) are also used. It is not possible to provide a single number here as funding comes from different sources and ministries.

Further information about funding initiatives at federal (national), Länder (state) and EU level for career guidance, career preparation, vocational training, transitions and additional training in the database of the Office for Transitions to Training and Work [28] (Fachstelle Übergänge in Ausbildung und Beruf).

See also Traineeships and Apprenticeships > Funding [29] and Integration of Young People in the Labour Market > Funding of existing schemes/initiatives [30]

Quality assurance

There are no general quality assurance systems in place for career guidance and counselling services in Germany.

Art. 29 et seq and Art. 288a et seq of Book III Social Code (Sozialgesetzbuch [3], SGB III [4]) – Employment promotion (Arbeitsförderung) contain principles that are applicable to counselling, including career guidance and labour market counselling, which apply to employment agencies. The Federal Employment Agency (Bundesagentur für Arbeit, BA) sets basic mandates and targets in its instructions on quality assurance tools and the enhancement of processes in the customer portal (Weiterentwicklung der Prozesse im Kundenportal [31]). It has also issued guidelines that apply to career counselling for young people under the age of 25 [32].

The BA careers service guides young people throughout the process of choosing a career. It helps them to identify their strengths, provides information on careers and on apprenticeship opportunities, and assists them in getting access to the career they want. The service is low-threshold, neutral, gender-sensitive, appropriate to the target group and their needs, accounts for each case individually, and is results-oriented. The methods applied are based on the BA counselling concept (Beratungskonzeption [33]).

Twice a year, the BA centre for customer and employee surveys (Zentrum für Kunden- und Mitarbeiterbefragungen der Bundesagentur für Arbeit, ZKM) carries out surveys of under-25s [34] who have used counselling services provided by employment agencies. The results are analysed and given to employment agencies to help them improve their services continually. In 2016 for the first and to date only time, schools were surveyed on the subject of career guidance. The aim is to keep this quality assurance process in place.

BA also supports external quality assurance systems, such as the Career Choice Seal of Approval (Berufswahlsiegel [35]). The Career Choice Seal of Approval helps to ensure that quality in schools is improved continually. It is awarded to schools with excellent career and study guidance programmes.

Art. 14 of the Framework Act for Higher Education (Hochschulrahmengesetz [36]) says that higher education establishments are required to tell students and prospective students about the study courses available and the content, structure and demands of a course of studies. The Act also says that higher education establishments must support students throughout their entire studies by offering professional advisory services. Universities must also cooperate with the bodies responsible for career counselling when providing study counselling.

Quality standards [37] exist for carrying out analyses of potential as part of the vocational orientation programme of the Federal Ministry of Education and Research for school pupils in years 7 and 8.

From 2009 to 2014, the German National Guidance Forum (Nationale Forum Beratung, nfb) and the
research group for quality and professionalism in career guidance (Forschungsgruppe Beratungsqualität) at the Institute of Educational Science at Heidelberg University (Institut für Bildungswissenschaft der Universität Heidelberg, IBW) developed a Quality and Professionalism in Career Guidance and Counselling concept (Beratungsqualität in Bildung, Beruf und Beschäftigung [38], BeQu). The concept helps advisors, counselling services, politics and public administration bodies to keep improving quality and professionalism in their own areas. It contains cross-functional and cross-institutional quality standards. No plans are in place at present to apply the concept nationwide. At the moment, individual associations, institutions and other agencies apply the standards and work in line with the BeQu system. To date there is no systematic and continuous feedback from the users of the BeQu concept. No conclusions could be drawn from the results of the accompanying research project or an online survey.