Responsible bodies

The employment agencies entrusted external certification bodies (so-called Fachkundige Stellen) with the task of inspecting maintaining bodies for continuing education in the area of vocational continuing education as promoted by the Federal Employment Agency [1] (Bundesagentur für Arbeit).

The Central Office for Distance Learning of the Länder of the Federal Republic of Germany [2] (Staatliche Zentralstelle für Fernunterricht der Länder der Bundesrepublik Deutschland – ZFU) decides whether or not a distance learning course is to be approved.

Approaches and methods for quality assurance

The increasing importance of lifelong learning has also promoted the awareness of binding quality standards in the field of continuing education. The plural structure of maintaining bodies which support continuing education is also expressed in the number of different efforts and approaches for quality assurance in continuing education. Both jointly and individually, Federation and Länder promote numerous projects for improving quality assurance in continuing education.

In 2004, the support of continuing education was reformed with the aim of improving competition and transparency in the area of vocational continuing education as promoted by the Federal Employment Agency. In a further reform in 2011, the scope of compulsory registration was extended in order to further improve the quality of labour market services and thus the performance and efficiency of the labour market policy support system. Since then, the Accreditation and Licensing Regulation for Employment Promotion (Akkreditierungs- und Zulassungsverordnung Arbeitsförderung – AZAV) has regulated the corresponding licensing procedure. According to the AZAV, the competent bodies (Fachkundige Stellen) must decide, unlike in the past, not only on the approval of continuing vocational training providers, but also on the approval of all providers who want to offer measures of active employment promotion under the Social Security Code III [3] (Drittes Buch Sozialgesetzbuch – Arbeitsförderung). Licensing of the maintaining body of a continuing education measure by an expert body is a prerequisite before participants can obtain support in accordance with the Social Security Code III. Amongst other things, maintaining bodies of continuing education must prove that they apply a recognised quality assurance system.

The quality management models currently applied cover countrywide supra-regional procedures specific to general or continuing education, as well as systems that are regional or specific to particular associations or federations. An overview of the various quality management models in further education and training can be found in the publication Portraits of Quality Management Models for Further Education and Training (Porträts von Qualitätsmanagement-Modellen für die Weiterbildung) from 2011, which was funded amongst others by the European Social Fund (ESF).
Since 1 January 1977, distance-learning courses provided by private organisers (institutes of distance-learning) must be approved by the state on the basis of the Law on the Protection of Participants in Distance Education \[3\] (Fernunterrichtsschutzgesetz – FernUSG). In the admission procedure, the subject-related and didactic quality of the learning material with regard to the objective of the course, as well as the advertising placed for the course and the form and content of the distance-learning contract entered into is examined by the Central Office for Distance Learning of the Länder of the Federal Republic of Germany \[2\]. In 2007, the new quality standard PAS 1037 for providers of distance-learning courses, distance-teaching and E-learning was introduced. The new standard meets the specifications of the Federal Employment Agency \[1\] for the certification of bodies of further education and furthermore relates to international standards of quality management. For newly developed distance-learning courses from providers who have already been certified in accordance with the new quality standard, a simplified admission procedure with the ZFU can be anticipated.

In October 2004, a quality certificate was introduced for all of Germany for suppliers in all areas of continuing education. The Learner-oriented Quality Certificate in Continuing Education, Version 2 (Lernerorientierte Qualitätstestierung in der Weiterbildung, Version 2 – LQW 2) quality seal was developed as part of the joint project Quality Certificate in Continuing Education (Qualitätstestierung in der Weiterbildung) of the Commission of the Federation and the Länder for Educational Planning and Research Promotion (Bund-Länder-Kommission für Bildungsplanung und Forschungsförderung – BLK) and should provide orientation when searching for high-quality education offers.

The quality of continuing vocational education and training is guaranteed on two levels according to a recommendation of the Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training \[4\] (Bundesinstitut für Berufsbildung – BIBB) from March 2014:

- through systematic regulatory procedures involving the relevant protagonists;
- through public examinations

Important elements of this quality assurance system are legally anchored in the Vocational Training Act \[5\] (Berufsbildungsgesetz – BBiG) and the Handicrafts Code \[5\] (Handwerksordnung – HwO).

The continuing vocational education and training qualifications that are valid nationwide are regulated by law in statutory instruments. The Federation is responsible for the promulgation.

The statutory regulations require that the following key qualification features be stipulated in the statutory instruments:

- the title of the qualification,
- the examination objectives and thus the qualification level too,
- the content and requirements of the examination with which the individual achievement of the objective and thus the quality of the qualification process are determined,
- the admission requirements to the examination,
- the examination procedure.

The individual proof of qualification in continuing vocational education and training takes place in the context of a public examination. The competent offices and/or the competent state examination boards for the master craftsman’s examination are responsible for the local organisation and performance of the examinations.

The respective examination requirements are regulated by law through the federal law continuing training regulations. Legal standards also apply for the examination procedure in the form of examination regulations for the competent office, which have to be approved by the legal supervisory
authority. The BIBB main committee issues guidelines in this respect.

The Federation’s procedural regulation for the master craftsman’s examination applies for the approval and general examination procedure for the master craftsman’s examination in the craft sector and in craft-like trades.

The procedure to perform continuing education examinations stipulates a number of quality assurance elements, in particular:

- the creation of expert and independent examination boards
- the organisation of the preparation of the examination questions on equal terms
- the admission to the examination
- credit transfer modalities

The examination is an external evaluation that is not the responsibility of the teachers but of the publicly appointed examination boards. Appointing occupational experts to the examination boards ensures that the latest developments and innovations in the vocational field of action are taken into account in the examination process.

The procedures agreed on a federal level for the political committees and departments responsible for vocational education and training flank the elements of the quality assurance systems that are specified under law. The main committee of the BiBB (§ 91 BBiG), which brings together the quality assurance protagonists institutionally, has a major role to play for the continuing training regulations.

Apart from the education committees specified under law, working committees of the Federation exercise quality-assuring roles.

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