Bilateral Agreements

The traditional exchange programmes for pupils, foreign language assistants and teachers of the Educational Exchange Service [1] (Pädagogischer Austauschdienst – PAD) of the Secretariat of the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs [2] (Kultusministerkonferenz – KMK) are for the most part based on bilateral agreements on cooperation in the cultural and educational sector. With regard to international contacts and the international education in schools, the PAD is partner of the Ministries of Education and Cultural Affairs and the Senate Departments of the Länder. Furthermore, with regard to the implementation of foreign cultural and educational policy, the PAD is partner of the Federal Foreign Office [3] (Auswärtiges Amt). The PAD cooperates closely with bilateral youth organisations as well as competence centres and funding agencies for international youth work to support cooperation between schools from two states and also sits on numerous commissions and committees.

Within the European Union, the conviction has grown that targeted efforts are needed towards practically-oriented education and training for the transition into employment, on the one hand to improve the employability of the individual and thus on the other hand to combat the high level of youth unemployment. Many European states consequently initiated national reforms and also began to amend laws in the field of vocational education and training. Germany has a comparatively low level of youth unemployment (6.0 percent in January 2019 according to EUROSTAT).

In order to support the international cooperation on vocational education and training, the Federal Ministry of Education and Research [4] (Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung – BMBF), in close cooperation with the relevant departments and organisations, created the Zentralstelle der Bundesregierung für internationale Berufsbildungskooperation at the Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training [5] (Bundesinstitut für Berufsbildung – BIBB) in September 2013, in which the Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development [6] (Bundesministerium für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit und Entwicklung - BMZ) and the Federal Foreign Office are involved with their own personnel. The Zentralstelle acts abroad as the German Office for Cooperation in Vocational Education & Training [7] (GOVET) and is in charge of three key fields of work:

- FUNCTIONS AS THE ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE FOR THE ROUND TABLE on international vocational education and training cooperation, in which the departments involved in the international vocational education and training cooperation vote under the leadership of the BMBF.
- ONE-STOP-SHOP, i.e. central point of contact for inquiries from national and international protagonists in vocational education and training cooperation.
- ACCOMPANIES the international bilateral vocational education and training cooperations of the BMBF.
Cooperation and Participation in Worldwide Programmes and Organisations

Copenhagen Process in the Vocational Education and Training Sector

With the Copenhagen Declaration of November 2002, the ministers of the EU member states responsible for education together with the European social partners defined specific areas and steps for intensifying European collaboration in vocational training. Germany has played an active and key role in the Copenhagen Process from the start and is represented in all important working groups that were set up in order to implement the process. The Copenhagen Declaration identifies the promotion of transparency, recognition of qualifications and quality assurance in vocational education and training as the most important fields of action for the EU. At the European level, the following instruments are being developed or further developed as a matter of priority:

- **The European Qualifications Framework (EQF):** The EQF is a common European reference framework consisting of eight competence levels to which national qualifications frameworks are assigned. As a translation tool between the different national systems, it makes qualifications in Europe more transparent and comparable and promotes the cross-border mobility of learners and employees.

- **The European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET):** Parallel to the ECTS credit system in higher education, the Copenhagen process is working on the development of a credit system for vocational education and training. The aim is to award credit points for training modules for the transfer and crediting of training periods. As a European system, ECVET is to be based on voluntary participation and applied in compliance with applicable national laws and regulations with regard to evaluation, assessment, recognition and quality assurance.

- **The European Network for Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET):** In August 2008, the German Reference Agency for Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training (DEQA-VET) was founded as part of the establishment of a European network for quality assurance in VET. It is part of the European Network for Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training EQAVET (European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training) and is based at BIBB. EQAVET’s work is based on the recommendation of the European Parliament and the Council to establish a reference framework for quality assurance in 2009.

Another important instrument is the EUROPASS as a uniform transparency framework for qualifications and competences. The EUROPASS framework concept comprises a total of five documents. The individual documents are:

- EUROPASS CV
- EUROPASS Certificate/Diploma Explanation (for vocational education and training degrees)
- EUROPASS Mobility
- EUROPASS Diploma Supplement (for higher education degrees)
- EUROPASS Language Passport.

The EUROPASS was introduced throughout Europe in 2005. The documents serve to make the skills and qualifications of EU citizens clearly and easily understood in Europe, and therefore simplify and promote the mobility for learning and working. In Germany the National Europass Centre (NEC) is the contact for all questions relating to the Europass. It is located at the National Agency Education for Europe (Nationale Agentur Bildung für Europa) at the Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (Bundesinstitut für Berufsbildung – BIBB). The NEC administers the database to apply for Europass mobility. Issuing agencies of the EUROPASS Mobility are the PAD for the school sector, the German Academic Exchange Service (Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst – DAAD) for the

In June 2015 the responsible European ministers for vocational education and training met in Riga for the conference "Innovating for the Future of VET". Together with representatives of the social partners and the European Commission they discussed the future challenges in the working world. The results were set out in the Riga Conclusions. In these, the following five deliverables were defined on a EU level for the period 2015–2020 to boost employability and competitiveness:

- To promote work-based learning, i.e. learning at the place of work
- Further develop quality assurance mechanisms
- Enhance access to VET and qualification for all
- Further strengthen key competences in the curricula
- Introduce systematic approaches to, and opportunities for, initial and continuous professional development of VET teachers, trainers and mentors in both school and work based settings

The Riga conclusions are intended to serve as guidelines for the vocational training process in Europe and are accompanied, among other things, by an intensification of the European Alliance for Vocational Education and Training.

With the adoption by the Council on 22 May 2017 of the updated Recommendation on the European Qualifications Framework and the Council Recommendation of 20 November 2017 on tracking graduates, two main individual initiatives of the new European Skills Agenda were published. This also applies in principle to the Europass, which was adopted as a comprehensive meta-platform after revision by the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union on 18 April 2018.

Also relevant is the further development of the opinion of the ACVT (Advisory Committee on Vocational Education and Training) as a Council recommendation on a European framework for high-quality and sustainable apprenticeship training (March 2018).

In addition, the ACVT statement on the future of vocational education and training after 2020 of 3 December 2018, in which the relevance of high-quality vocational education and training (equivalent to higher education) is emphasised and an overarching Council recommendation on vocational education and training is laid out, is currently of significance.

**The Bologna Process**

Further major impulses for the internationalisation of German higher education institutes are provided by the intergovernmental Bologna Process, which builds on the Sorbonne Declaration adopted in 1998 by the ministers responsible for higher education in France, Italy, the United Kingdom and Germany. The Bologna Process was introduced in 1999 with the aim of creating a European Higher Education Area by 2010, characterised by a free mobility to be achieved through the transparency and compatibility of consecutive study structures, quality assurance systems on the basis of European standards and guidelines as well as the mutual recognition of academic achievements and qualifications. The objectives of the Bologna Process correspond with the reform efforts of the Federation and the Länder in the higher education sector.

In May 2018 the ministers responsible for institutions of higher education in 48 signatory states met in Paris to once again take stock. With a view to the current political and economic crises, special emphasis was made of the contribution of the Bologna process to intercultural understanding and peaceful coexistence, to equality, critical thinking and tolerance through academic freedom.
In order to further develop cooperation within the framework of the Bologna Process and to ensure the implementation of the basic commitments, the ministers decided in their final communiqué to set up expert groups to focus on the following three topics:

- a three-stage system compatible with the overarching Framework of Qualifications for the European Higher Education Area, the first two stages of which are equipped with an ECTS system;
- adequate implementation of the Lisbon Recognition Convention;
- Quality assurance in line with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area.

Germany has implemented the objectives of the Bologna Process in these three core areas and is making its experience available to other participating states.

The Bologna secretariat currently has its registered office in Italy. The secretariat will organise the work until 2020 on the basis of the decisions of the 2018 Ministerial Conference. This will deal in particular with the adequate implementation of all resolved projects in all European institutions of higher education.

In implementing the Bologna Process, Germany has achieved further progress over past years. According to the joint national report [12] of the Standing Conference and the BMBF on the implementation of the goals of the Bologna Process 2015–2018, the German focus for the further development of the European Higher Education Area is on the further promotion of mobility and exchange, the strengthening of strategic partnerships between higher education institutions throughout the European Higher Education Area, and the promotion of the development of European higher education networks by 2024. At present, the guarantee of scientific freedom and institutional autonomy in all states is seen as a particular challenge.

The German Bologna Follow-Up Group advises on the current developments and practical problems associated with the implementation of the Bologna Process. This group consists of representatives of the Federation, the Länder, the German Rectors’ Conference (Hochschulrektorenkonferenz – HRK), the German Academic Exchange Service, students, the Accreditation Council (Akkreditierungsrat), the social partners and the German Student Services Association (Deutsches Studentenwerk). Federation and the Länder support the reform of the German higher education system with numerous measures. These include inter alia the Higher Education Pact to create additional study places, the Teaching Quality Pact (Qualitätspakt Lehre) to improve quality in study and teaching, the competition “Getting ahead through education: Open higher education institutions” (Aufstieg durch Bildung: Offene Hochschulen) for more permeability and study financing instruments (Federal Training Assistance for study abroad, educational credit and scholarships). This is in addition to the mobility promotion offered by the Federation via the DAAD and the Alexander von Humboldt-Stiftung as well as the funding offered by the HRK project “nexus”, which supports higher education institutions in implementing study reforms in Germany, and the team of Bologna experts which is coordinated by the DAAD.

**Recognition of foreign qualifications**

Germany ratified the Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region (Lisbon Convention), which was resolved on 1 April 1997, on 1 October 2007. The Convention provides for the simplified recognition of foreign coursework and qualifications and aims on the one hand at recognition for the purpose of higher education admission and on the other at the assessment of higher education qualifications for the purpose of entering the German labour market. The higher education institutions are responsible for recognition for the purpose of higher
education admission, for admission to further study courses and for the crediting of specific courses and examinations. The right to carry titles conferred by foreign higher education institutions is regulated by the Land higher education laws. Information on this is distributed by the Länder education ministries. Holders of foreign higher education qualifications can apply to the Central Office for Foreign Education (Zentralstelle für ausländisches Bildungswesen – ZAB), based in the Secretariat of the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder, for an assessment [15] of their degree. An administrative fee currently amounting to Euro 200 is charged for this assessment, further assessments cost Euro 100. Detailed information on degree assessment is available on the website [16] of the ZAB. Information on the recognition of foreign vocational qualifications can be found on the website [17] of the Federal Government “Recognition in Germany” and on the telephone hotline operated by the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge – BAMF) "Working and Living in Germany". Since 2016 the website has also been the German advisory centre for questions on the recognition of foreign vocational qualifications at EU level.

The Central Office for Foreign Education is the competent information and expert body for the rating and ranking of foreign academic certificates in the Federal Republic of Germany. On an international level the ZAB cooperates closely with the national centres of equivalence in the countries of the European Union (NARIC), the European Council and UNESCO (ENIC). Through the anabin database [18] the ZAB provides information on the education systems of around 180 countries. The data ranks more than 34,000 foreign education certificates and is open to the public. For authorities a password-protected area is available.

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