

### **Recruitment and induction in enterprises - An interesting subject for vocational education and training research?**

Current European policy processes in the area of vocational education and training — such as the Bologna Process in the higher education field, the Lisbon Strategy, the joint work programme of the education ministers and the Copenhagen Process for vocational education and training have fuelled demand throughout the EU for comparative data and information on VET . The Lisbon Strategy has also boosted interest in comparisons with other regions such as North America and Asia.

One important area of focus when comparing different education and VET systems is the transition from school to work. Research has shown that those systems which combine formal education with learning in actual work processes are very successful in integrating youth into the labour market and that countries with such systems suffer less from youth unemployment than countries with other forms of VET (Müller & Gangl, 2003). However, this link has become less pronounced in the last decade (Brzinsky-Fay, 2007). At the same time, research on the school-to-work transition has shifted its focus from examining the outcomes of youth transition processes to taking a closer look at patterns and periods of work / employment / education during youth. For individuals, this is the primary phase when competences are developed: During these years, youths become skilled at putting their formal learning to practical use in real-life situations, are faced with new challenges and learn how to master them. For employers, an examination of the school-to-work transition is particularly interesting with regard to the following questions:

- Do new entrants in the labour market have the skills and competences that I need?
- Who should I recruit and what qualifications should he/she have?
- Will new recruits be able to meet the demands they will be confronted with at work?
- What do I need to do to help recruits develop the skills and competences they need to in order to perform their work?

Precisely these questions are currently being examined in two research projects that the Federal Institute of Vocational Education and Training (BIBB) is conducting on a comparative international basis:

- Recruitment at the intermediate qualification level - Case studies from Germany, England and Switzerland (<http://www.bibb.de/en/wlk49729.htm>)

- Induction processes and development of career entrants as an indicator for the output and outcome of educational systems (INDUCT) (<http://www.bibb.de/en/wlk51673.htm>).

Preliminary results from the first project have been published (Gonon, Hippach-Schneider, & Weigel, 2010) and presented to different audiences including a workshop at the American Educational Research Conference in Denver in the spring of 2010. The approach taken by the latter project was presented and discussed at last year's European Educational Research Conference in Vienna (Schnitzler, et al., 2009).

However, the issue of recruitment and induction is not an entirely new topic for BIBB's work. The Institute conducted its first research project on this subject in the late 1980s / early 1990s on national level. The 1988 report "Learning after apprenticeship. The first years of employment as a phase of learning" <sup>1</sup> analysed learning and professional development during the first years of employment following completion of (initial) vocational education. It was found that continuing learning and education become increasingly important after completion of one's apprenticeship. However, in the discussion regarding the benefits of work-based vocational education, the fact that employers can reduce their induction and instruction costs when they employ their apprentices following completion of initial vocational training is usually seen as an advantage that work-based vocational education offers over school-based education (Cramer & Müller, 1994; Herget & Walden, 2002). Large enterprises that provide apprenticeships consider the amount and duration of work-based familiarisation that apprentices need when they are first employed after completing their apprenticeship as an indicator for quality of their vocational training – the better the training, the less familiarisation is necessary (Bremer & Jagla, 2000). Recent research on induction is often based on an analysis of induction processes in specific enterprises and therefore does not usually lend itself to generalisation (Drees, 2009; Rappe, 2006). A first international overview on research on induction processes has just been published (Zdravkovic, 2008). However it revolves primarily around organisational socialisation and targets neither the issue of professional knowledge and skills nor the issue of matching qualifications, young labour market entrants, and job requirements.

The above-mentioned INDUCT research project was designed as a feasibility study that will end in autumn 2010. One of the aims of this study is to develop and test a standardised survey for examining employers' recruitment strategies and induction processes.

In preparation of developing and testing the survey, case studies were carried out in Germany (BIBB, Bonn), Spain (IKEI, San Sebastian), the UK (IES, Brighton) and Finland

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<sup>1</sup> Lernen nach der Lehre. Die ersten Berufsjahre als Qualifizierungsphase

(RUSE, University of Turku) in two occupational fields: Car Service and Business Administration. Interim findings from these case studies can be summarised as follows:

- Differences between countries do exist in terms of the duration, content and structure of induction: German VET graduates are seen as quite well prepared for their work tasks following their initial training and require less induction. Longer induction periods of up to three years are reported particularly in connection with the more school-based VET systems in Spain and Finland.
- There are differences between the car service and business administration fields in terms of the amount of time that must be spent on induction. There seems to be a better fit between job requirements and qualifications in the business administration field than in the car service field.
- There also seems to be more leeway in the business administration field than in the car service field in terms of qualifications and work organisation.

BIBB is currently planning a longer-term project for the years 2011 - 2013 in order to continue examining the relationship between qualifications, recruitment and induction on an international basis. This project will draw on two previous projects which have contributed results that can be followed up in the coming years. In addition to these projects which were/will be conducted by BIBB, a doctoral thesis was begun in 2010 to take a closer look at the induction process in general. An initial analysis of current research showed that there is variety of disciplinary approaches to this research and a lack of a common understanding of the concept of induction training. The aim of the thesis is to find a research approach to the field of induction that reflects this interdisciplinarity and complexity.

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