Tertiarisation of Vocational Education and Training and its implications – problems and issues in Germany and France

In many countries there is growing pressure that Vocational Education and Training (VET) should not only produce portable skills for the labour market, but also enable individuals to progress to Higher Education (HE). At the same time, new forms of “tertiary” VET have emerged, both in countries with a more market-orientated VET system (such as England and Australia), and in those with a more traditional orientation along the apprenticeship model, such as Germany and Switzerland. The functionality of VET qualifications and underlying pathways is therefore embedded within a more general debate on flexibility and permeability, in which both “vocationalisation” of HE and “tertiarisation” of VET find their places. This also includes the notion of “hybrid qualifications” (HQ) and with it “diversification” of VET. Both issues, in political and pedagogical terms, are obviously rather underrepresented in the German VET context, while Switzerland and Austria, for example, have either undertaken reforms in this area or are able to build on more or less traditional imprints in their respective VET systems.

Since HQs are a tool to serve official government policy by “bringing” more young people into Higher Education against the background of the Lifelong Learning policy and in the face of the notion of permeability and progression, these and other instruments supporting “tertiarisation” clearly have implications for the future status of conventional VET pathways, such as the dual system of apprenticeship training in Germany. This chapter points out different forms of tertiarisation and their implications for VET, and also tries to make a critical review of current German and French educational policy.

1. Introduction and problem focus

The notion of a ‘vocation’, combined with the concept of specified initial training, underlies the established model of skill formation in Germany and is traditionally rooted in the country’s cultural and economic history (Zabeck 1983). Thus, it may be surprising that Germany’s ‘dual system’, which incorporates this notion by imparting labour market-relevant competences to a large share of the school-leaving population, has also been criticised in research on VET. Here it has often been argued that this system also represents aberrations and supposed deficits in the German education system in general. Assumptions that the dual system has exceeded its ‘minimum expiry date’ emphasise the intensity of such criticism,
most notably throughout the 1980s and 1990s. However, an examination of the
general social and economic benefits of the apprenticeship system in comparison
to other countries (Harris & Deissinger 2003) and of its contemporary interna-
tional reputation reveals the banality of such statements from authors critical of
the system (e.g. Geißler 1991).

From another perspective, however, the question arises as to whether this char-
acterisation of the dual apprenticeship system might be justified. While it has long
been considered a “mass apprenticeship system based on the strong occupational
identity of those holding the corresponding qualifications” (Ryan 2003, 150), now
the problem of an emerging ‘battle for apprentices’ has entered the current public
agenda. This new problem appears to be particularly associated with the chal-
lenges emanating from tendencies towards ‘tertiarisation’ within the German
educational system (Deissinger 2015b). Hence, the new stream of criticism has
moved away from an ‘internal’ perspective and towards the question of whether
the dual system – and with it non-academic pathways into employment – still find
their deserved social acceptance beside higher education. The new view is rather
an ‘external’ one, focused on the various sub-systems of the German education
system and their links to each other.

In this chapter, these streams of criticism will be identified and described by
focusing on a number of aspects which are interesting and relevant to both VET
research and VET politics alike. It needs to be pointed out from the beginning that
‘tertiarisation’ or ‘academisation’ have their roots in the upper-secondary educa-
tion system which, in Germany, incorporates both full-time and part-time VET
courses, as well as higher formal educational programmes in the general education
system, such as those provided by grammar schools and comprehensive schools,
leading into an increasingly diversified higher education system. The ‘academic
drift’ towards upper secondary education (which also means delaying or at least
reducing selection after primary school) has a lot to do with the educational aspi-
rations of parents, as they are manifestations of what some sociological research
has called ‘meritocratic logic’ (Goldthorpe 1996; Lutz 1986). According to this
principle, which rules the social attributes given to education and educational de-
cisions, the main function of certificates, qualifications, and underlying pathways
by no means derives from the benefit of the contents of the respective qualifica-
tion, but rather from its formalised result. France, with its hierarchy of qualifica-
tions and an unambiguous perception of the differences between vocational and
general learning, exemplifies this phenomenon very clearly (Ott 2015). And there
is some evidence that Germany is on the way to adopting this mentality. ‘Meritoc-
cratisation’ in Germany could indeed be taken as a consequence of educational
expansion in general education, while at the same time it seems to be closely associated with the abandonment of an appreciation of VET at social, political and educational levels. In addition, it has become obvious that one consequence of meritocratisation is the decreasing relevance and acceptance of those institutions that traditionally prepared pupils for vocational training, the lower secondary schools (Hauptschulen), even in the traditionally conservative southern federal states of Germany. In these regions, too, these schools are now increasingly enrolling lower achievers who have not succeeded in progressing to the upper streams of secondary education. This results in a decline in the number of young people who are the 'typical' clientele for vocational training in the dual system. At the same time, companies notoriously complain about competence deficits among potential apprentices graduating from the lower ranks of secondary education.

The recent academic drift also becomes visible in the concept of the Gemeinschaftsschule (a kind of comprehensive school merging lower and intermediate secondary schools) where objectives such as permeability (Durchlässigkeit) and non-selection are the underlying pedagogical and, more to the point, political motives. The federal state of Baden-Württemberg’s abolition of the Grundschulempfehlung (Bohl & Meissner 2013; Bellenberg & Forell 2012; Maaz, Baumert, Gresch, & McElvany 2010),¹ which suggests which school a boy or girl should proceed to after primary education, provides further proof that education policy is fostering the attitude that higher education is naturally a more rewarding and socially preferable pathway for young people.

The number of young people taking up higher education courses in Germany is now higher than the number of beginners in the dual apprenticeship system (BMBF 2014, 6). This trend in the education system exerts a more or less direct impact on subsequent educational streams leading away from VET. At the same time, employers have been reducing their commitment to offering apprenticeship training during the last couple of years. It may be asserted, therefore, that the dual system itself indirectly also has the potential to foster tertiarisation. Interestingly,

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¹ In the federal state of Baden-Württemberg, Gemeinschaftsschulen were introduced following a change of government in 2011. The main motive for the Green-Red state government was to react to the dwindling acceptance of lower secondary schools and to create a new strategy for regional school development in the face of demographic change. This school type resembles the comprehensive model which was discussed as early as the 1960s, being a love child of the Social Democratic Party. It is now also considered a tool to bring about greater equality of opportunity in contrast with the established three-tier system of secondary education (Autorenguppe Bildungsberichterstattung 2014; BÜNDNIS 90/DIE GRÜNEN/SPD Baden-Württemberg 2011).
the insight that educational expansion and the underlying meritocratic aspirations are bound to affect VET was already discussed in the late 1950s (Herrlitz, Hopf & Titze 1986, 155). Today, however, we are challenged to look at this phenomenon in a more differentiated way.

‘Dualisation’ within higher education, and with it ‘vocationalisation’, have now become familiar features of an increasingly differentiated higher education system in Germany – e.g. with the *Berufsakademien* (vocational academies which combine academic and practical training) and ‘dual universities’ respectively (Zabeck & Deissinger 1995; Deissinger 2000). These institutions have the potential in the long term to replace some of the non-academic vocational qualifications with more general undergraduate or graduate degrees. Although their share of commencing students amounts only to some 4% (Autorenguppe Bildungsberichterstattung 2014, 123), they clearly represent a new kind of structural expansion of the higher educational system but do not necessarily produce dysfunctional results, as they ‘copy’ the vocational principle of the dual system to a certain degree. It is necessary, therefore, to underline what has been said about the dual system, which represents a kind of functional vocationalism to which most researchers in the German VET community refer more or less positively. This also means that the terms *Beruf* (vocation) and *Berufsbildung* (vocational education) are still paramount in VET research, notwithstanding the critical arguments we have mentioned above (Baethge & Baethge-Kinsky 1998, 470; Greinert 1994a, 2015, 176; Harney 1998; Kutscha 1992; Zabeck 1999).

The following statement by Baethge and Baethge-Kinsky underlines this very clearly (Baethge & Baethge-Kinsky 1998, 470):

> It could [...] be sensible and useful for now – and we consider it this way – to hold on to the professionalisation of vocational training. The reason for this is the effectiveness of the vocational principle with respect socialisation and allocation of human beings within the economy and society. As a matter of fact, similar capable alternatives and orientations are hard to find.

This statement can also be supported immediately when looking at the principle of vocation from a purely functional point of view within the scope of non-academic VET routes – especially if one thinks of the sub-optimal performance of the so-called ‘transition system’ (*Übergangssystem*) for lower achievers and its unsatisfactory outcomes in leading young people into training and skilled employment (Schmidt 2011). This sub-system still counted for more than 250,000 young people in 2013 and can be described as a sector in post-secondary education and training with a persistent dynamic potential (Autorenguppe Bildungsberichterstattung 2014, 98). Against this background, there is a lack of really well-working
‘alternatives’ to the dual system – since full-time VET predominantly operates in a different way from the dual system (Deissinger, Smith & Pickersgill 2006): besides delivering some specific occupational qualifications (e.g. in social and health care) most full-time vocational schools equip young people with higher school qualifications. Nearly all certificates opening up studies at a university of applied science (Fachhochschule) are obtained in a vocational course outside the apprenticeship system. In the federal state of Baden-Württemberg, only 0.3% of graduates in general secondary education obtained this certificate in 2013, while its share in the full-time vocational sector was 38.1%, and the contribution of vocational schools to full university entrance qualifications amounted to one third of all Abitur certificates (Landesinstitut für Schulentwicklung/Statistisches Landesamt 2015, 201f., 223f.). We will touch on this issue again later on.

In the following sections, the principle of vocation, underlying the dual system, will not be looked at only from the perspective of a labour-market-relevant training architecture, as there is now a new area of conflict brought about by the growing tertiarisation within Germany’s culture and education system. Our main intention is to answer the question of how far these developments are strong enough to produce a potential hazard for VET in the dual system. We will also pick up some comparative issues between Germany and France where educational traditions, like those in the Anglo-Saxon countries, are strongly determined by the problem of an ‘academic-vocational divide’ (Davey & Fuller 2013).

2. Tertiarisation as a manifestation of the generalisation of the vocational, and vocationalisation of the general, in the context of the German education system

Political analyses have pointed to the specificity of developments leading to the modern educational systems in Europe after World War II. One major observation is that the gap between elitist general education in secondary schools and tertiary institutions on the one hand and vocational education and training on the other widened until well into the 1970s. It has been typical for academic institutions to create and maintain highly selective recruitment practices and cultures of access and progression, while the vocational world remained separated and restricted to training in a narrow sense – which meant that market mechanisms succeeded in dominating both state regulation and underlying educational principles. Since the 1970s, however, relevant national differences have become more visible, although they may well be traced back to the time before 1945. Against this background, political scientists distinguish a social democratic model of statist skill formation (e.g. Sweden), a liberal skill formation regime (e.g. England) and a type labelled
collective skill formation, for which Germany is exemplary (Busemeyer & Schlicht-Schmälzle 2014), as here consensus of various stakeholders is needed on both the establishment and the acceptance of vocational training courses and the overall regulation of teaching and learning within the VET system. In this configuration of mutual interest in a functioning apprenticeship system, employer organisations, chambers and trade unions operate in a specific way, including particular links with, and established practices in cooperation with, the various state institutions (Deissinger 1996; Kreft 2006; Raggatt 1988; Zabeck 1975).

Especially when looking at the third type or model, the boundaries between vocational and academic education are clearly visible, owing to the fact that the dual system's working principles differ manifestly from those of higher education, including its comparatively weak government regulation (despite the fact that Germany possesses a Vocational Training Act, which is not necessarily common in other European countries; see Deissinger 1995). The assumption that the dual system in Germany has led to a suppression of the demand of academic education is interesting in this context (Ansell 2010, 191). If we put this argument upside down, we may also ask whether, on the one hand, in the present situation a dual system which, for various reasons, nowadays obviously falls short of absorbing the majority of school leavers, could influence academic drift by even magnifying its intensity (although there are certainly other relevant factors behind this development). On the other hand, the increasing number of commencing students in Germany who have no formal university or higher education entrance certificate (Abitur or Fachhochschulreife) militates in favour of vocational education. Nevertheless, the quota of a modest 2.6% of non-high-school graduates among higher education students still appears low (Autorenguppe Bildungsberichterstattung 2014, 126).

Nevertheless, when looking at other figures, the weight shift towards academic studies, i.e. away from vocational education, seems to be nothing short of significant. Between 2000 and 2013, the number of new entrances into the dual system decreased by 15%, whilst the number of those who accessed tertiary institutions increased by 59%. Currently fewer young people find themselves in a non-academic vocational apprenticeship (outside full-time vocational schools or the transition system) than in tertiary institutions. The share of people in the 30-to-35 age group with a higher education entrance qualification now stands at 43%, as against 22% among the 60-to-65 year olds (Autorenguppe Bildungsberichterstattung 2014, 7). In the light of increasing though sometimes regionally diverging numbers of high-school graduates, the gap might still widen in the future in favour of the academic sector. Because of this increasing academisation, high potential
apprenticeship starters who hold a full or partial higher education entrance qualification and who would normally enter dual training as a credible alternative to higher education, could be diverted from a segment within the apprenticeship system which has for quite a long time been attractive both for employers and for school leavers (Euler 2014, 322; Autorengruppe Bildungsberichterstattung 2014, 98). Currently, however, an impressive share of 24% of beginners of apprenticeship training who hold a formal qualification allowing them to go on to universities or universities of applied science is contesting this thesis. Some 70% of new apprentices in banking (Bankkaufmann/frau) come from the upper floor of general or vocational education (BiBB 2014, 160).

Against this background reality appears to be more complex:

- First, academisation and tertiarisation do not have only one underlying cause. Environmental conditions in our social system certainly influence this development, above all through the ‘meritocratic principle’ determining the choice of education by an ever larger number of parents (Goldthorpe 1996; Lutz 1986). On the other hand, there are certainly factors which operate within the VET system itself that have to be looked at to understand specific features of academisation in Germany.

- Second, academisation and tertiarisation are as such more complex and multifaceted, especially from the point of view of vocational education. Moreover, it is through structural convergences between the two large educational subsystems (higher and vocational education) that ‘vocationalisation’ is not fading but emerging in a new coating.

If one looks beyond the academic function of universities and the function of vocational education to open up progression to higher education (through vocational full-time schools predominantly), some current dynamic developments are obvious. Academisation and tertiarisation are evident in the secondary school sector, in the tertiary sector and in vocational education alike.

Two forms of structure within the vocational education system contribute to what may be called generalisation of the vocational. At the same time, both also imply characteristics of the opposite, i.e. vocationalisation of the general, because they transfer principles and goals of the traditional (pre-vocational) general education system from schools into the vocational sector. This transfer works through differentiation and subdivision of functions (Deissinger 2015b):

1. First, full-time vocational schools clearly work as a subsystem of VET, which mainly offers general qualifications. Thus they relate to the general educational programme by imparting the same qualifications (lower secondary,
intermediate secondary, upper secondary). Vocational school qualifications which are not geared to the labour market (Feller 2000; Deissinger Smith & Pickersgill 2006) refer to the function of VET to open up the so-called “vocational education career pathway” (beruflicher Bildungsweg). In this context, schools such as Berufsoberschulen (leading to a general university entrance qualification), Fachoberschulen and Berufskollegs (advanced vocational schools leading to admission to universities of applied science) and vocational high schools (leading to a general university entrance qualification) have to be considered. These schools link directly to the higher education system (Schindler 2014; Expertenrat “Herkunft und Bildungserfolg” 2011, 144). There is however a kind of structural link with the dual system, too, since higher education entrance qualifications in Germany are often used to obtain a high-level apprenticeship placement, e.g. in banking, insurance or other commercial occupations. It may be claimed, therefore, that this manifestation of generalisation within the VET system is not necessarily endangering the dual system. It has already been said above that one quarter of beginners in the dual system have a tertiary entrance certificate and hence full-time VET also has a tendency to stabilise the apprenticeship system. The significantly high numbers of beginners in the dual system in federal states with high shares of the school population in upper secondary education strengthen this argument (BiBB 2014, 152).

2. Second, there is a (small) segment within the vocational full time school system which delivers ‘hybrid qualifications’ (Deissinger, Aff, Fuller & Jorgensen 2013). These institutions offer “combinations of accredited general (academic) and vocational learning and attainment that formally qualify for entrance to higher education and the labour market” (ibid., 8). Hybrid qualifications, especially in Germany, may be considered as a tool leading to a kind of generalisation of vocational education. Their relevance and importance is underlined by their function within the education system to open up vocational pathways into higher education (though in most of the cases only into the universities of applied science). A good example of this kind of hybridity is the ‘vocational college’ (Berufskolleg) in the federal state of Baden-Württemberg which – this is the other side of the coin – fails to produce labour-market relevant qualifications against an over-mighty dual system (Deissinger & Ruf 2006; Deissinger, Smith & Pickersgill 2006; Deissinger, Heine & Ott 2011; Euler 2000). Hybrid qualifications and their underlying educational programmes are on the one hand located in the vocational context, but on the other hand remain mostly separated from apprenticeship training (Frommberger 2012, 187), which emphasises their ‘general’ or ‘scientific’ character. Therefore, hybridity which is
not linked to vocational training in a narrow sense, as is the case in Germany, also has a stabilising impact on the dual system. Companies in Germany, at least in some major occupational fields, clearly prefer recruiting high quality school leavers from upper secondary education to other applicants for an apprenticeship. Graduates from the Berufskolleg in Baden-Württemberg now increasingly belong to this group and they are perceived by employers as having a strong aspiration towards a company-based career (Expertenrat "Herkunft und Bildungserfolg" 2011, 133; Deissinger & Ruf 2006, 122).

The following structural developments in the tertiary sector in recent years may now, in contrast, be associated with vocationalisation of the general. At the same time, these developments also express a kind of generalisation of the vocational, because they raise vocational education up to the tertiary level and therefore contribute to 'meritocratically' enhancing the vocational dimension, both in the education system and in society.

3. ‘Cooperative universities’ or ‘dual universities’ (Duale Hochschulen), whose institutional realisation as ‘vocational academies’ (Berufsakademien) dates back to the 1980s in Baden-Württemberg (Deissinger 2000; Zabeck & Deissinger 1995), meanwhile show structural similarities with conventional tertiary education systems, although they do not yet offer Master degrees. However, they are oriented mostly towards the dual system, as they copy the structure of learning sites and specific, though differing, structural features of cooperation between industry and higher education institutions. Two learning venues, the practical relevance of an apprenticeship together with the simultaneous scientific relevance of the competences needed in a company, the strong involvement of companies, which – as in the dual system – are responsible for the selection of their students, an explicit reference to qualifications needed in the labour market, and the didactic and curricular interlocking of theory and practice – all these principles were inherited from the much older apprenticeship system. In fact, tertiary institutions in most cases are unfamiliar with these aspects of a ‘vocationalised’ and explicitly practical course of learning. In general, ‘dual universities’ have become more important as they display a low dropout rate and allow an unproblematic start to employment because of the character and quality of their qualifications and the essential role of employers (Kupfer 2013). There is no doubt that these institutions stand for a successful convergence of vocational and tertiary education (Euler 2014, 322, 327).

4. A wider form of “extension of vocational education into the tertiary sector” (Euler 2014, 326) may be associated with vocationalisation of the general. This means that, regardless of far-reaching structural innovations such as the
‘dual universities’, but rather as a result of the Bologna Process concerning study programmes (Brändle 2010), most German universities and faculties (except for medicine, education, law and theology) are now designing new or revising Bachelor and even Master programmes and qualifications with an increasing vocational specification or at least orientation (Euler 2014, 322). It is, in particular, the universities of applied science that strive to excel in the university system, because they may be considered to be the elder relatives of ‘dual universities’ through their application orientation (which also means that dual universities now are formally equal in status to the universities of applied science).

It is now interesting to mirror these developments, expressing the various kinds of academic drift in Germany, against the unique positioning of the dual system as the key component of the VET system, which has an unambiguous non-academic character and function.

3. The overall importance of company-based apprenticeships in the dual system of Germany as a background variable for tertiарisation

The denomination of the German dual system as a “separate, but cherished, alternative to academic education” represents not only its role model function, but indirectly also the problem of differing valuations of these two (separated) subsystems, i.e. the academic and the non-academic educational pathway (Busemeyer & Schlicht-Schmälzle 2014, 67). This is quite astonishing, as the dual system is now widely acknowledged as a comparatively well functioning qualification and integration model. Southern European countries, and also Anglophone countries, including, e.g., Canada, are looking at possibilities to adopt or even transfer functional elements into their own VET architecture (Euler 2013; BMAS 2014).

The dual system is in fact a major pathway into skilled employment and also a crucial element of workforce development for many companies. As an apprenticeship system its core element is qualifying young people for an ‘occupation’ (Deissinger 1998; 2010; Deissinger & Breuing 2014), although it also opens up formalised progression to further training (such as the ‘Meister’). There is a number of historical and cultural reasons for calling it the “centrepiece of vocational education and training in the Federal Republic” (Raggatt 1988, 166), an argument which can still be supported when looking at the statistics of VET. This chapter does not deal with this tradition in detail. However, referring to it is necessary, since history provides a number of explanations of why it is not advisable, with-
out pointing out reservations and limitations, to transfer the German vocational training system simply to other countries, whether in the industrial or in the developing world. The reason for this is that the character of the dual system may be pinned down to features which help us to understand that the German apprenticeship system is more complex than the term ‘dual’ might suggest at first sight (Deissinger 2015a).

One reason for this is the above-mentioned ‘vocational principle’, which is one of the crucial underlying cultural and mental patterns in the German VET system (Deissinger 1998). It means that initial VET is directly linked to occupational qualifications which can be used by their owners on ‘external labour markets’, where companies look out for the holders of these qualifications (Sengenberger 1987). Against this background, the dual system is a setting for merging private (the companies), semi-private (above all the chambers) and public interests and responsibilities (the government), including the trade unions (Deissinger 2010; Greinert 1994b; Kreft 2006). The regional chambers are the most central element among those functions that help to ensure that vocational training is clearly ‘occupation-led’ and not ‘company-based’ in the first place, which sets it apart from the Anglo-Saxon ‘competence approach’ (Deissinger 2013; Hellwig 2006). The contribution of the ‘competent authorities’ is based on the principle of self-government (Zabeck 1975). Training contracts, too, must be registered with the chamber. They are also in charge of holding examinations for journeymen, skilled industrial workers, commercial clerks and master craftsmen or master industrial workers, as well as for trainers, and thus maintain ‘occupational standards’ in a most varied way. All these elements have the function of guaranteeing that the ‘right’ qualifications are delivered and companies stay committed to apprenticeships. They are therefore both a quality framework for initial vocational training, and also a framework where state and non-state institutions cooperate quite successfully. It has to be added that the principle of self-government (Selbstverwaltungsprinzip) is not a contemporary feature which was designed on a drawing-board, but rather goes back to the ancient medieval guild system. As it never wholly disappeared in the process of industrialisation, it basically survived as a cultural pattern. It was through the Craft Act of 1897 that the foundations of the corporatist framework, still typical of the dual system, were laid (Deissinger 1996; Greinert 2015, 23), as it led to a revival of the guild system and stipulated chambers as self-governing organisations within the craft sector. Therefore, in Germany, there is a “long-standing and highly regulated participation of business/industry in training” in the initial training sector, which is certainly “an outstanding feature of the German system” (Noah & Eckstein 1988, 62).
Recent statistics have revealed that academisation is not just happening in those areas we have described above, but also includes a kind of creeping vocationalisation within the higher education sector (BMBF 2014, 47). With these trends in mind, we actually have to assume that there are a number of ambiguities.

On the one hand, there is increasing social pressure towards academisation, and this should not be underestimated, as learners ‘deviate’ from the vocational towards the tertiary sector (Autorengruppe Bildungsberichterstattung 2014, 98). As a consequence, “well qualified youths are no longer available for vocational training” (Severing & Teichler 2013, 9). On the other hand, academisation in the sense of vocationalisation of the general takes place whenever – be it in general or higher education – the ‘vocational element’ is emphasised, or alternating (dual) forms of VET are copied. Following the differentiating explanations concerning the four features of tertiarisation we have outlined above, it is not the vocational part of the educational system which is endangering the dual system (for example by the so-called ‘vocational education path’ or by hybrid offers); according to Euler, emerging dangers are rather the result of an “extension of VET into higher education” (Euler 2014, 326). The ‘dual universities’ are an example for these developments, since they hold alternative offers in attractive occupational segments within the economy for high school graduates.

Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that the environment of the dual system has changed, as we consider the pressure towards academisation emanating from the pre-vocational educational system to be particularly strong. Against this background, it is evident that the stakeholders in the dual system must feel disconcerted. The president of the Association of German Chambers of Industry and Commerce (DIHK 2015) warns against the “collateral damage” of the “increasing share of students” and “academisation at any price”. Authors join in, such as Nida-Rümelin, who is convinced that it is necessary to re-define the importance of the dual system and warns against an “insanity of academisation” (Nida-Rümelin 2014). While companies anticipating a constant need for practically-trained employees (Schütte 2013, 51) might run out of skilled workers, higher education institutions deplore growing capacity problems as well as underfunding – albeit varying from federal state to federal state. The other social partner, the trade unions, take a similar position. According to Drexel, “problematic consequences” for companies have to be expected in the wake of academic drift, which could also harm the “interests of employees” (Drexel 2010, 47). Statistical data support these fears, since there has not only been a decrease of intakes into the dual system since the turn of the millennium, but also a sliding participation of companies in training (Autorengruppe Bildungsberichterstattung 2014, 99) – both in the training
quota (i.e. the share of trainees in the workforce) and the training company quota (i.e. the share of companies carrying out dual apprenticeship training).

All these assumptions and concerns are supported by a number of VET researchers (Rauner 2012; Severing & Teichler 2013; Hippach-Schneider & Weigel 2013; Schütte 2013). Whilst Rauner sees the vocational component as a basic element of non-academic education at risk, Severing and Teichler refer to the removal of systemic boundaries. In their view, the focus will probably no longer be on the “creative coexistence of two big spheres, but – besides the general trend towards academisation – on the stabilisation of a sphere which can rather be considered as ‘residual’” (2013, 16). Moreover, it cannot be denied or even ignored that the OECD fosters the current trend towards academisation by praising incessantly the advantages of academic studies and by attesting German-speaking countries’ backlog of demand for higher education graduates (Alesi & Teichler 2013, 19). However, it is highly problematic to ignore the fact that the well-established vocational pathways in the German-speaking countries – such as the apprenticeship systems in Germany and Switzerland, where companies (at least in Germany) also succeed in attracting a remarkably high proportion of graduates from upper secondary education, or the vocational full-time schools in Austria (Aff 2006) – are highly functional training and education pathways for labour market entry and career formation, although they tend to be stigmatised as socially or economically worthless or at least as meritocratically dysfunctional (Bosch 2010, 29).

Recently, this fact has even been confirmed by the OCED itself, albeit with an (again) ambivalent undertone (OECD 2014, 308):

> Many countries have recently renewed their interest in vocational education and training (VET) programmes, as these programmes are seen as effective in developing skills among those who would otherwise lack qualifications to ensure a smooth and successful transition into the labour market [...]. Countries with well-established vocational and apprenticeship programmes have been more effective in holding the line on youth unemployment [...]. At the same time, some consider vocational education a less attractive option than academic education; and some research suggests that participation in vocational education increases the risk of unemployment at later ages [...].

Even if this could be rated as an argument in favour of VET, statements of political decision-makers in Germany reveal an interesting ambivalence: noted commitments to vocational training, especially to the apprenticeship system, as an important element of the German education system with its “outstanding position and performance in international comparisons” (BMBF 2014, 5), alter with the repetition of common OECD rhetoric calling, for example, for a benchmark of 40% of an age group to enter higher education (BMBF 2013, 16). At the same time,
the particular appreciation of an expansion of higher education is supported by emphasising the need for more permeability between VET and higher education. Thus, it is indeed remarkable that permeability in Germany – unlike in many European countries – is only barely realised within the vocational training system, but happens rather directly from employment or via established qualifications of further vocational training (especially the master craftsman’s certificate). With this in mind, it is certainly right to highlight the so-called ANKOM-initiative in Germany as a significant catalyst for appropriate opening processes and “third educational pathways” from work into higher education (Frommberger 2012, 184). ANKOM (Anrechnung beruflicher Kompetenzen auf Hochschulstudiengänge) is the crediting of vocational competences towards college courses. At the same time, ‘double’ or ‘hybrid qualifications’ in Germany, as mentioned above, have not really entered the contemporary political agenda, unlike in Austria with its high-level technical and vocational colleges, and in Switzerland with its professional baccalaureate (Deissinger et al. 2013; Ebner & Nikolai 2010; Expertenrat “Herkunft und Bildungserfolg” 2011, 141; Gonon 2001; Greinert 2015, 170). At least we cannot assume that there exists a ‘standard’ of a vocational baccalaureate tied to the apprenticeship system (Bosch 2010, 32). The Kollegstufenmodell (college level model) of Blankertz in the 1970s is a symbolic example (Blankertz 1972) of the failure of educational policy to bring it about. Neither segmentation of competences resulting from German federalism nor the strong positioning of the apprenticeship system as a socio-economically respected ‘qualification model’ (Harris & Deissinger 2003) were abolished in the wake of educational reform in the 1960s and 1970s (Zabeck 2009, 659 ff.).

The view that it is only academic pathways that open up successful professional and personal careers may be true in an economic perspective and in terms of life-time earnings, but in a pedagogical perspective, we doubt whether this is always consistent with the needs and aspirations of young people. Fortunately, an expert report for the Baden-Württemberg government bearing the title Herkunft und Bildungserfolg (Social background and educational success; see Expertenrat “Herkunft und Bildungserfolg” 2011) made differentiating and pedagogically sensible comments on the reform of the school system. Both the fact that it discussed selected aspects such as selection (against the background of the recent dumping of the Grundschulempfehlung, i.e. the mandatory recommendation for parents where to take their child after year four), and its reference to support measures for weaker pupils that are considered essential, confirm that selection mechanisms based on a reliable transition diagnosis and the allocation to the ‘right’ type of
school (the Werkrealschulen\textsuperscript{2} are explicitly mentioned here) must not necessarily be out of bounds.

It is interesting that experts explicitly want to encourage parents who do not see their children to be en-route to academic upper-secondary school (Gymnasium) (ibid., 108 ff.). This statement appears ambiguous, but according to a pedagogical perspective, and bearing in mind the legitimate individual right of equal opportunities as well as the importance of the 'right' (selection) choices concerning transition from primary to secondary education within a still two- or three-tier system (depending on the respective federal state), it also holds the message that the main purpose of school education should be offering and opening up chances without obstructing them at the same time. In other words, inflated academic ambitions or choices due to non-reflective meritocratic thinking of parents run the risk of leading to unhappy lives and dysfunctional occupational pathways, and – even more relevant to pedagogy – may also cause serious overload for children and youth.

Therefore, our preliminary conclusion is that Germany runs the risk of jeopardizing its ‘core asset’, the dual system, through an inflated social tendency towards meritocratic thinking and dubious reforms of the school system. It is now interesting to look across the Rhine and ask how France is currently coping with the challenges of academisation and how they affect the VET system there.

4. Tendencies in the relation between vocational and higher education in France

Traditionally, the French VET system has been considered to be a state-regulated, school-based system (Greinert 1988) with a strong focus on the transmission of (theoretical) knowledge (Rauner & Wittig 2009, 25). In comparison to other European countries’ VET systems, this characterisation is understandable, particularly when historical developments and political traditions are considered. However, it obviously reflects the contemporary VET system only to a limited extent, since it fails to consider recent reforms which have profoundly changed the French educational system since the mid-1980s (Ott 2015).

\textsuperscript{2} Werkrealschulen are extended lower secondary schools (years 5–10), leading young people with a more applied learning inclination to the same certificate as in intermediate secondary schools (Realschulen). These schools have also suffered a kind of reputation damage in recent years since they are associated with lower learning abilities and more hands-on vocational careers (Autorengruppe Bildungsberichterstattung 2014).
At the end of the 18th century, the French Revolution had ended the ancient forms and institutions of VET in France (Harney 1990, 220) and there were no considerable efforts to restore the previous VET system or to develop a new one during the 19th century (Troger 2004, 12). The modern institutionalisation of VET began with the introduction of the first vocational diplomas in 1911. However, the nationalisation of VET – which came with the scolarisation des apprentissage (Greinert 1999, 70; Kirsch 2006, 93) – took place as recently as the 1940s, against the background of World War II, when the state was granted the exclusive right to organise exams and award diplomas. Around this time, more and more full-time vocational schools were established in order to address unemployment among the young (Brucy & Troger 2000, 14; Greinert 1999, 91 f.; Ott 2015, 132). For a number of decades, this newly established, state regulated and school-based VET system looked like a success – even if it only played a marginal and rather inferior role in contrast with academic education. Serious problems welled up only with subsiding economic growth and in the wake of an expansion of education in the 1960s and 1970s, when more and better qualified people started to compete for a shrinking number of jobs. Against the background of the ‘meritocratic logic’, which, unlike in post-war Germany, is the crucial trait of the French education system as a whole (Deissinger 1998, 184; Fourcade 2007; Lattard 1999; Lutz 1986; Méhaut 2010), vocational pathways increasingly were perceived as blind alleys (Maillard 2007, 34; Troger 2004, 15).

**Academisation of the vocational – attempts to increase the esteem of VET**

During the 1960s and 1970s, strengthening the general and theoretical content of VET curricula was considered an appropriate instrument to increase the esteem of vocational pathways (Greinert 1999, 38; Ott 2015, 136). A further argument here was the expectation of the general importance of theoretical knowledge (Bouder & Kirsch 2008, 3; Méhaut 2013, 205). Both the CAP and the BEP have

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3 These were the so-called CCP (Certificats de capacité professionnelle) which, in 1919, became the current CAP (Certificat d'aptitude professionnelle) (Brucy 2007, 19; Kirsch 2006, 92 f.; Troger 2004, 12). The next steps leading to the typical school-based French VET system were the introduction of mandatory attendance at vocational schools in the same year (Brucy & Troger 2000, 12 ff.; Ott 2015, 125 ff.) and a memorandum of the minister of education Edouard Herriot in 1920 defining the education of workers as an “education of producers, individuals and citizens” (Méhaut 2013, 202).

4 In 1967, this policy led to the introduction of the BEP (Brevet d'études professionnelles). The main feature of this ‘second generation’ of vocational diplomas in France (Kirsch 2005, 14) was the “higher share of theoretical and general education” intended
co-existed until now as the major VET diplomas, although the BEP has undergone fundamental changes and is likely to disappear completely in the near future (Ott & Deissinger 2010: 501; Méhaut 2013, 205 f.). This development can also be seen as failure of the original idea to improve the status of VET against tertiary education via *academising the vocational* within the established VET programmes and curricula, i.e. by focusing on theoretical learning at the expense of vocational content. As a consequence of this stream of education policy, the French VET system apparently risked losing its functional character in relation to the labour market (Bouyx 2005, 31; Hörner 1996, 96). Employers increasingly complained about a vocational education and training that was too far away from the world of work and deplored that job entrants widely had to cope with serious obstacles and dysfunctionalities when starting their career (Couppié & Mansuy 2004, 153).

In the 1980s, French education policy embarked on new endeavours: VET was structurally integrated within the education system as a whole through the introduction of the vocational baccalauréat (BacPro), a vocational degree that holders of a BEP or CAP can achieve within one or two years respectively after their first vocational degree. Formally, this vocational baccalauréate equals the general baccalauréate as it opens up the way to the tertiary system in that it is a hybrid qualification (Méhaut 2013, 201; Kirsch 2005, 14). Unlike the BEP, however, the curricula of the vocational baccalauréate are much more geared to work, as they are based on so-called *référentiels des activités* (catalogue of work activities) – which are the product of a functional analysis of the relevant occupational profile (Ott 2015, 286). Hence, the French vocational baccalauréate is a generic degree and not the counterpart of the German vocational *Abitur* (mostly obtainable in vocational high schools). According to the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research, the French vocational baccalauréate is acknowledged as a formal equivalent to vocational training certificates in the German apprenticeship system (BMBF 2004), which underlines its labour market relevant character.

The reforms of the French VET system in the 1980s may also be characterised as a manifestation of *academisation of the vocational*. On the one hand, the qualification formally allows its holders to enter the tertiary sector, but on the other hand, the main focus of the vocational baccalauréate training programmes is on the working environment (Méhaut 2013, 206). The BacPro is not only based on functional analyses of workplaces, but it also comes with a fundamental rediscovery

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5 With the 2009 reform of the vocational baccalauréate, the BEP became an intermediate-level qualification in the now three-year course leading to the BacPro.
of the workplace as a learning site (Méhaut 2006, 6; 2010, 124 ff.). For this reason, all apprentices who visit a vocational full-time school and want to graduate in a vocational baccalauréate programme have to pass through a period of practical training within a company (Méhaut 2006, 6). Furthermore, the vocational baccalauréat is now no longer restricted to students enrolled in full-time vocational schools. As of 1987, it has become possible to obtain the BacPro through a dual training programme, the so-called apprentissage, which takes place as an alternating form of learning in an apprenticeship centre and in an apprenticing company (Ott 2015, 160). The vocational idea seems to be at the heart of this new category of vocational courses and qualifications, even if the BacPro formally links VET to the academic system as a hybrid qualification (Méhaut 2013).

Vocationalisation of the academic

The introduction of the vocational baccalauréat not only reformed the vocational sector, it was also meant to contribute to the rise of educational levels in general. It was already in the orientation law of 1989 when the government proclaimed that 80% of school leavers should have at least a qualification which entitles them to embark on higher education. Some critics claim that this once more represented a policy that feeds meritocratic thinking and tends to devalue vocational qualifications (Hörner 1996, 86). On the other hand, the hybrid character of the BacPro may also be criticised as a sham, since the degree – which explicitly allows its holders to continue their studies in the tertiary sector – does not really, in didactic terms, prepare them for the universities (Beaud 2002; Méhaut 2013, 207).

Therefore, following the argument brought forward by Méhaut, the vocational baccalauréat is indeed a kind of false hybrid qualification on the way to becoming a true hybrid (Méhaut 2013, 197, 207). Most of the holders of vocational qualifications are not interested in university degrees such as the licence (the French Bachelor), even if there are no selection barriers in most courses. In contrast, the BTS or DUT7 seem to be very attractive tertiary diplomas for vocationally qualified persons, as they are lower-level higher education programmes which also combine theoretical and applied education and normally take two years to complete. Both programmes are supposed to prepare graduates for direct transition to the workplace (Zarca 2010). Interestingly, and to a certain extent similar

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6 As of 2002, this degree can also be obtained through the accreditation of prior learning via the so-called VAE (Ott 2015, 170 ff.).

7 Brevet de Technicien Supérieur (introduced 1959); Diplôme Universitaire de Technologie. – The DUT is obtainable at university institutes called IUT (Instituts Universitaires de Technologie).
to Germany's vocational academies or 'dual universities', these higher vocational courses are increasingly on the way to becoming vocational Bachelor degrees. Méhaut therefore supposes that the DUT may disappear in the long run and suffer a similar fate as the BEP (Méhaut 2013, 206 ff.).

The expansion of the BTS\(^8\) also underlines that there certainly is a need for vocational orientation in French tertiary education. Beyond the success of programmes which prepare students for an immediate entry into the labour market, there have been structural changes in higher education that can be described as vocationalisation of the academic. A major step was the Loi Séguin in 1987 which opens up all qualifications (including those in higher education) for graduates from the apprentissage (Ott 2015, 160). The same applies to the VAE (Validation des Acquis de l'Experience), as the French version of accrediting prior learning, which was first introduced in 2002. Under this model, the degree in question is awarded by the institution responsible for the respective qualification (ibid., 324). This (at least formal) diversification of learning pathways in higher education testifies that the workplace has become a relevant and valuable learning site in recent years and that this principle now covers quite a number of levels in the French classification of qualifications.

5. Conclusion

We have seen how differently the two countries try to cope with the status problem of VET, although in the case of Germany this seems to be something unknown until recently. Both countries engender tendencies that can be characterised both as vocationalisation of the general and generalisation of the vocational. The French system has given birth to a hybrid qualification, the BacPro, which has certainly contributed to establishing a new vocational orientation within education policy.

\[^8\] The holders of a BTS are also invited to add a third year to achieve a Bachelor degree. In contrast to the DUT, the BTS is provided in vocational full-time courses (Zarca 2010), which makes it attractive for vocationally qualified persons. If they pass the selection process, they can continue their studies in a context which is familiar to them, while transition to university (with the vocational baccalauréat or with a BTS) would mean a change of the learning culture that is said to be one of the reasons for the high failure rate of holders of vocational baccalauréats studying at universities (Beaud 2002). For this reason, most of the holders of a BTS leave the education system (Grelet, Romani & Timotéo 2010, 1), and it seems to be less likely at the moment that the BTS will be replaced by Bachelor degrees. The attractiveness of the BTS comes with a multiplication of BTS specifications (Zarca 2010). According to Céreq, there are at present 111 different profiles (Céreq 2015).
by bringing schools and labour market closer. Academisation tendencies in Germany appear in a specific light against these comparative findings. They have to be mirrored against the context of Germany's strong vocational traditions, both in the education system and in educational theory (Deissinger 2011). Still, the dual system is attracting considerable attention, since a number of countries, above all in Southern Europe, are trying to introduce similar concepts of structured apprenticeships leading to initial vocational qualifications. Manifestly, there is an expectation among politicians in particular that such a system solves the integration problems of school leavers into VET and the labour market by combatting youth unemployment (Deissinger 2015a). However, looking at what has been said about the features of the German dual system, it has to be added that even a vocational training system which strongly resembled the pattern of German apprenticeship would probably function in a different way and imply different consequences, for cultural and historical reasons, once transplanted into another country (Deissinger 2015a). At the same time, there can be no doubt that the dual system has its pitfalls and deficits, especially as it is highly dependent on a functioning economy and a sound labour market. The so-called 'transition system' is a good example for a selective perception of German VET. Coming back to our main topic, academisation even seems to reinforce this effect, since companies have developed a highly selective attitude to hiring apprentices. Besides, the higher education system is becoming more and more varied. On the one hand, academisation leads to more 'vocational' study courses, and on the other, the determination of young people to move into the higher education sector may in the long term put the apprenticeship system in danger, as the joint impact of tertiarisation and demography might no longer be counteracted by the conviction that vocational training is a relevant and rewarding pathway into employment and a career.

The forthcoming shortage of skilled workers which – as research confirms (Maier et al. 2014) – interacts with the 'one-dimensional educational expansion' towards higher education, and also the critical reception of Anglo-Saxon experiences (Deissinger 2013) should be the essential triggers, though not the only ones, for dealing with the problem of tertiarisation. These triggers have a potential to influence a fundamental debate about the relationship between vocational and higher education. The debate should focus on the widening 'academic-vocational divide' and should be free from ideological convictions. Among the latter, unfortunately, the OECD's stance has always been paramount, ignoring the role of vocational education for many years. It would be a good signal if this institution became more aware of the benefits of VET both for young people and for social and economic stability.
Therefore, research and policy require new concepts to redirect the omnipresent trends towards academisation in a pedagogically and socially responsible manner. On the one hand, the development of functional alternatives to higher education that draw on the benefits of the dual system of apprenticeship training seem to carry appeal, as they bear the potential to increase employers’ commitment to training. On the other hand, however, it is necessary to ensure that talented young people do not ignore the apprenticeship system when they look out for career options. Besides, there is also an apparent need to create innovative ways for vocational preparation and orientation within the ‘transition system’, in particular when it comes to re-structuring these ‘measures’ for low-performing school leavers who were not able to find a training company (Euler & Severing 2006). Such a targeted perspective which takes ‘promotion’ literally would not only stabilise the apprenticeship system, but would also throw a more differentiated light on the ‘vocational pathway’ that appears rather one-dimensional at the moment. The French case illustrates quite clearly that lifting the status of vocational education has always been and to a certain degree still seems to be a challenge, although some of the developments that have taken place in this country are also encouraging, let alone the fact that French educational policy has embarked on a concept (VAE) which resembles a more Anglo-Saxon understanding of competence.

References


