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Policy Implications and Recommendations: When do hybrid qualifications work and what benefits can be expected from them?

Our project was set out with the intention, besides delivering a European survey of current practice in the field of hybrid qualifications (HQ), to investigate and clarify, through an empirical approach, perceptions of learners, lecturers, and other stakeholders concerning the nature and value of these qualifications. The final aim has been to develop recommendations for policy and practice based on our research outcomes. One "guideline" for the pragmatic dimension of the project lies in the identification of "best practice" in one or more of the participating countries. Based on the results of the first country reports of our Leonardo project, but above all of the second ones (cf. <www.hq-lll.eu>), we now try to point to implications and messages for the responsible actors in the field of education policy. Any "innovation transfer" using experiences with HQ, has inevitably to refer to "best practice approaches". Two reservations, however, remain: First, the adaptation of the premises of the European Qualifications Framework, from which our project topic has emerged, can be largely different between countries, even between those with similar VET traditions; second, the fact that hybridity works (well) and fits into the "landscape" of a national education and training system is always dependent on the "environment" in the respective country, socially, politically and economically, even if pedagogical arguments (progression, individual development, career formation) are considered in favour of HQ or related concepts in a more or less common understanding.

The following sub-chapters pick up the perspectives of the four partner countries constituting the project consortium respectively. A major focus here lies on conditions of HQ implementation, but also

on the issue of "best practice"[1]. A final synopsis has been added to illustrate the different range and the impact of HQ in the respective national educational architecture.

The case of Austria: hybridity and the importance of full-time VET – conditions, policy implications and policy recommendations

Although it is beyond doubt that educational systems are closely interrelated with the respective historical, cultural, socio-economic etc. contexts of a country and therefore transfer is only partly possible, an efficient anchoring of HQ in any national education system needs certain conditions, which can be summarized as follows for the Austrian situation, where hybridity is a strong component not just within the VET system, but also within the education system as a whole.

Austria's VET system, as far as apprenticeships are concerned, has many similarities with Germany, due to many parallel historical developments going back to the Middle Ages. Also, Austria is a federal state although the central government has a major say in educational matters, including the regulation of schools involved in VET. The more "holistic character" of the Austrian VET system may be an expression of this comparatively strong state regulation, but it is also the structure of the system itself which appears more homogeneous than in the German case. Generally, observers call it a "two-column system" as two types of full-time VET (representing specific levels of educational achievement for a different clientele) stand in par with the dual system, which is not as highly rated both socially and economically as in Germany and is not seen as the most relevant pathway into skilled employment.

1 Data and facts referred to in this chapter stem from the four country reports (see references). Therefore, further references are only used in rare cases where it seemed necessary.

Against this background, Austria has roughly as many participants in full-time VET as in the apprenticeship system, and more undergraduates come from vocational schools than from general education. The *two institutions* offering this pathway to school leavers are the "Berufsbildende Mittlere Schule" (BMS) and "Berufsbildende Höhere Schule" (BHS) respectively (Aff 2006). The BHS seems to have established itself as a particularly attractive track since it offers entry into high-level occupational markets and full access to the universities. How closely BHS and higher education seem to be interwoven can be seen in the fact that even titles commonly used in the tertiary system, such as "Ingenieur" (normally a diploma qualification equivalent to a Master), are degreed at the BHS in its technical variant (Archan & Mayr 2006, p. 55).

Curricular requirements

For hybridity, its two components, namely general education and vocational training, have to be integrated in the curricula in an appropriate, balanced way. An analysis of typical curricula of both the business-oriented and the technical vocational colleges at secondary level II (Handelsakademien, Höhere Technische Lehranstalten) in Austria reveals an almost ideal "hybrid allocation of subjects". About 50 % of all subjects at vocational colleges can be categorized as general education – i.e. subjects such as languages, mathematics, science and social studies. The vocational education "second pillar" can be divided into theoretical subjects such as economics or engineering (30 percent) and in subjects where a simulation of professional practice takes place (about 20 percent) – for example in training firms at business-oriented vocational colleges or in workshops and laboratories at technical colleges. In addition, there are different types of mandatory internships, which are either completed during the school year or in the summer holidays.

Education policy requirements

HQ at secondary level II imparting full ability to study and "employability" at the same time require a sophisticated infrastructure (workshops, computer equipment, etc.) and highly qualified teaching staff, whose salaries are roughly competitive with that of the private sector. This means that HQ need financial groundwork and they have to be supported by education policy. The outstanding importance of vocational schools and colleges in Austria is reflected in the national expenditure on education: Approximately 12% of the total amount of some 16.3 billion Euro spent on education in the year 2010 were transferred to full-time vocational schools and colleges (BMS and BHS). In comparison, only around 3.6% were fed into the vocational schools within the dual system, while 9.5% went into the grammar school system (AHS). These data illustrate the "price" of a well-working full-time VET system and a sophisticated type of an HQ at secondary level II[2].

The deliberate political decision in favor of hybridity in vocational education at secondary level II is documented by the statement of the former Chancellor Bruno Kreisky who stipulated that in every political district in Austria a secondary high school should be established – with a focus on vocational training. In due course, between 1971 and 1980, in Austria a massive expansion of vocational schools and colleges took place, which also meant that, at one stage, in just two years a total of 113 schools were built.

Labour market policy requirements

Graduates from schools that impart HQ have to acquire not only a pre-vocational education, which is typical for Scandinavian education systems, but real job opportunities. Ideally, graduates should be courted by the companies on the labour market "as a scarce commodity" like in the case of graduates from Austria's vocational colleges of engineering. In a recent study on the need of the economy concerning skilled workers in the largest Austrian federal state of Lower Austria (Niederösterreich), Schneeberger points out that for large companies the recruitment of graduates from colleges of engineering proves to be more challenging compared to graduates from universities and universities of applied science because the demand for "hybrid technicians" is particularly high (Schneeberger 2011). The OECD statistics do not differentiate between pre-vocational education and real employability and therefore these empirical findings only partially reflect reality, as the connotation of HQ in the Austrian context implies their strict interpretation as professional qualifications. This means that hybrid educational pathways impart demanded and real job prospects and not merely a more or less serious pre-vocational training without labour market relevance. A key condition for the latter is that companies value the graduates from vocational colleges as highly skilled employees and thus ensure adequate demand for these courses.

2 See: <http://www.statistik.at/web_de/statistiken/bildung_und_kultur/formales_bildungswesen/bildungsausgaben/index.html> (12/02/2013).

Demands for an unlimited tertiarisation: a critical Austrian view

In addition to realistic labour market perspectives, HQ in Austria allow access to all universities and universities of applied science – which means *full access* to HE on the tertiary level. This school qualification (Matura) is, in terms of reputation and acceptance, equivalent to the school leaving qualification at grammar schools. Although graduates from vocational colleges primarily choose courses in those areas on which they already focused during their time in school, studies from the broad spectrum of tertiary education, between medical and linguistic studies, are also taken up by a minority of graduates. It should also be noted that, depending on the type of vocational college, between one third and two thirds of the graduates actually take up studies at universities or universities of applied science.

This positive finding on the current situation and status of HQ at secondary level II might become more differentiated in future in Austria. There are a number of developments that pose major chal-

lenges. For example, it is difficult to predict how the "Bologna process" and the likely bulge of Bachelor degrees are going to affect the competitiveness of graduates from vocational colleges in the long run. Likewise, the strategy advocated by the OECD that shifts vocational education to the tertiary education sector contradicts a concept of linking vocational education with a solid general education at secondary level II. An increase of academic graduates – as advocated by the OECD – implies a different education policy than the Austrian way which favours expansion of HQ at secondary level II. The strengthening of HQ at secondary level II with polyvalent life perspectives for graduates (employment – studies) is based on a different understanding of higher qualifications than the one articulated notoriously by the OECD, who maintains that higher qualifications are largely equated with academisation. The Austrian case proves that academisation and vocational/professional orientation can coincide as objectives of VET when they receive adequate attention from policy makers as well as, which seems even more important, from employers and society as a whole.

HQ by and large are only relevant for society if the main stakeholders advocate such a training track. Accordingly, the market relevant "currency" of HQ is determined by the acceptance on the labour market and by tertiary education institutions, especially universities. Since these conditions are given for graduates from vocational colleges in Austria, there are enough students who are interested in these kinds of educational pathways. It is the BHS which is seen as the major "winner" of this shift away from both general higher secondary education and the apprenticeship system. With the introduction of Bachelor degrees in the wake of the "Bologna process", however, it is the commercial academies (Handelsakademien) in particular which are likely to come under increased pressure since new qualifications are welling up to replace the older ones, above all in the more sophisticated (theoretically orientated) occupational sectors.

Nevertheless, the Austrian HQ concept may be called a "best practice" model, as here HQ are fully integrated within the education system, and they certainly have a strong pedagogical standing in relation both to the dual apprenticeship system and to academic

education at secondary level II. The fact that more school leavers in Austria obtain an "A Level" from a vocational full-time school than from general education is a viable proof for the status and functionality of HQ and underlines a generally favourable political climate for VET. There is also evidence for this due to the fact that Austria in 2008 introduced an HE option within the apprenticeship system, the so-called "Berufsreifeprüfung", which leads young people into all strands of HE via the dual system. Therefore it may be stated that Austria is not just a "hybrid country" when it comes to full-time VET, since education policy here is also focused on the traditional "practical" track in the VET system.

The case of Denmark: hybridity between school-based and apprenticeship-based VET

The challenge for HQ is simultaneously to provide and be recognized for providing occupational specificity and general education. In the case of Denmark, both opportunities and dilemmas become manifest in particular when trying to introduce a hybrid programme in a dual training system that is organised according to an employment logic and where work-based training makes up the largest part of the programme.

Conditions for hybridity

What is the situation relating to HQ in the Danish educational system and what does it look like in international comparison? Compared with other Nordic countries, Denmark has the most "classical" type of a dual system. Though it has some differences in comparison to the German dual system, it shares with this system a scarcity of pathways from the dual system to HE. This can be explained by the different historical origins of the general and the vocational tracks and their organisation according to either an educational or an employment logic.

The strength of the dual system of VET is increasingly becoming its weakness. The dual system is successful in giving direct and fast access to employment for students. In addition, the system provides qualifications that prepare for a high degree of flexibility and mobility on the labour market and a high degree of professional autonomy (task discretion). Thus the "unmodern" apprenticeship model has proven to be very much in line with the requirements of a (post-)modern labour market. The total number of young people completing a programme in the dual system has been stable for decades and contributes to a very low rate of youth unemployment in Denmark.

However, as the dual system does not give access to HE in Denmark, only around 3% of an age group continue from VET to the tertiary level and complete an HE course. Simultaneously, the enrolment of youth in the general track of upper secondary education has grown strongly and this has put the dual system of vocational education under pressure. It is increasingly seen as a "blind alley" in relation to continuing and academic pathways – with HE increasingly seen as *the* pathway to a successful career. In fact, programmes for HQ do not exist in the strong meaning of the concept[3]. Interestingly, though, a new hybrid programme was launched in 2010 on the basis of the dual system – and the chapter will explore the opportunities and barriers facing this programme.

Curricula, organisation and pedagogy

Denmark and the other Nordic countries have a strong tradition of comprehensive non-selective systems of education. But the gap in Danish higher secondary education between the two tracks (academic and vocational) is quite deep and concerns social recruitment, curricula, pedagogy and learning culture, but also the legal framework and the form of governance of education. The two types of

3 The project members agreed to focus on a strong definition of HQ *and* on initial training. The *strong* definition implies full access to HE and full access to the labour market, as well as societal recognition/status.

education also have separate institutions locally: on the one hand the Gymnasiums and on the other hand the vocational colleges.

The *academic track* today comprises four different programmes, the classical Gymnasium (stx), two vocational programmes, one technical (htx) and one business (hhx), and the Higher Preparatory Exam (hf). The classical Gymnasium is chosen by 39% of an age group, while 16% go to the vocational Gymnasiums (hhx and htx). The Higher Preparatory Exam (hf) is primarily aimed at adults, and is a pathway to obtain HQ in a weaker sense by giving access to HE for a small group of students with a certificate from the dual system.

The *vocational track* is based on the dual system with strong roots in the traditional apprenticeship model (like in Germany). The basic principles of dual education, the predominance of work-based learning and a corporatist form of governance still continue today. Initial VET consists of four programmes: technical, commercial, agricultural and social and health care programmes, which cover the entire labour market.

The vocational Gymnasium (htx and hhx) can be considered as an institution that provides HQ as it is located in the legal and administrative framework of the vocational colleges but gives access to HE. The vocational programmes were reformed in the 1980s to widen social participation in the Gymnasium programmes. They have succeeded in recruiting from wider social groups that are more unfamiliar with academic education. The students generally have a stronger orientation towards the labour market and the polytechnics and business schools than students in the classical Gymnasium. The courses are only hybrid programmes in a weak sense, as they are purely school-based and do not entail certified qualifications which give access to the skilled labour market. The vocational Gymnasium is, according to the latest reform of 2005, part of the unified system of "gymnasium programmes", whose main purpose is to prepare for HE. More correctly, this programme could be termed "vocationally oriented Gymnasium" as its function is to lead into vocational programmes at HE level, such as engineering and business or economics.

The full-time school-based vocational programme has been offered since 1993 and has the potential for developing into a hybrid programme similar to the school-based programmes in Switzerland

or Austria. But the recruitment patterns and history of the programme make it difficult to upgrade it so that HQ could be offered on a large scale.

Labour market and educational market

Denmark has two different sets of legal regulations for the general and the vocational track respectively. This is primarily due to the pivotal role of the labour market partners in the occupational self-governance of the VET system. There is a close interdependence between the occupational self-governance and the continued success of the dual system. On the one hand occupational self-governance is a guarantor for the involvement of employers and thereby for their willingness to provide training places. Occupational self-governance is, on the other hand, a guarantor for the support of the trade union movement with respect to the terms governing the interchange of work and training that are crucial elements of the construction of apprenticeship as a form of learning. The unions accept that apprentices are employed in productive work at a low wage in exchange for getting access to training in the workplace. The question posed by the introduction of HQ in the dual system is whether this close connection with the labour market can survive.

Political priorities and decisions

Until a few years ago HQ have not been given any political priority. Since the dual system seems to work well, the state has traditionally avoided direct intervention in vocational training and by and large left it to the social partners to define the training ordinances, lay down procedures and monitor apprentices' training and examinations, approval of training places and so on. Instead, the state has concentrated on regulating the school-based part of VET and on indirect stimulation of the supply of internship placements by means of schemes for financial incentives, such as rewards for extra training placements. In the face of high dropout rates and dwindling es-

teem of VET as a "blind alley" education policy has returned to putting access to HE back on the agenda – and with it HQ.

Relationship between HE and VET

The Danish system of higher secondary education does not offer HQ, but gives young people a choice between either qualifying for the labour market through VET or qualifying for HE through the Gymnasium. Some learners do not follow these institutional routes, but create their own pathways of double education across the tracks, which then represent a weak realisation of HQ. One group are students who first complete the vocational Gymnasium and then shift to the vocational track to get a more direct and faster access to the labour market than through HE. Another group of people who take a double education are adults with a vocational education background who return to the educational system after some years of employment. A third group are adults who have entered the labour market after completing the Gymnasium or even HE and then take up an Adult Apprenticeship. Since double education represents a non-standard pathway it also tends to create problems. One problem is that the student runs the risk of having to go through the same curriculum twice. Another critical aspect is that double education means double costs of education. This explains the political interest behind the introduction of a hybrid programme in the strong sense. The barriers and dilemmas facing the new hybrid programme as they have been revealed by the interviews and by our desk research have been picked up in our chapter on Denmark in this volume in more detail.

Currency value and recognition of HQ from the point of view of stakeholders

The new EUX HQ (Vocational Education Extra), emerging in 2010, now represents a programme with a full HQ in the strong sense, which means that the two types of qualifications are transmitted in an integrated form in a single programme. The experience from the

developmental programme (EUD-HTX) makes it clear that in order to succeed the programme has had to cope with some serious challenges. These challenges relate to the institutional separation of the two types of qualifications that historically have existed in the Danish educational system.

The new hybrid EUX programme meanwhile has received full recognition from all stakeholders: government, social partners, vocational colleges – and young people who have applied for the programme to a larger extent than what was anticipated. The institutions of HE have only marginally been included in the negotiations over the hybrid programme, but it is expected that since the students will comply with the formal entrance criteria, access will be given to at least the most common destinations at the tertiary level, the polytechnics. An open question still can be seen in the opportunities for the students from the hybrid programme on the labour market, but earlier experiences signal that it is likely to be highly valued.

National and international message

It remains to be seen if the new hybrid programme will succeed in handling the dilemmas mentioned. Like in Austria and Germany a hybrid programme based on the dual system has to overcome substantial difficulties. The pilot projects and the new programme have given some indications of how these difficulties can be handled concerning time/duration, target groups, integration of curricula and learning environments as well as the issue of training placements.

The English case: conditions, problems and recommendations with respect to hybridity against the background of a strong "academic-vocational divide"

The challenge for HQ is simultaneously to provide and be recognized for providing occupational specificity and general education; it is demanding to reconcile these competing goals. In terms of how hybridity was defined in the project, we have to concede that our desk-based analysis and the empirical findings suggest that all the contenders for hybrid status we have considered fall short of the criteria specified in the strong definition. The contenders for strong hybrid status at Level 3 that we have explored do not provide full access to HE or the labour market.

Curricula and pedagogy – the English context

As the English system is characterized by its academic-vocational divide, the longstanding system conditions are not favourable for HQ. These alternative and separate pathways have dominated the system and its qualification offer, and so it is not surprising that curriculum and pedagogy are similarly divided along binary lines. The effort to reconcile and overcome this historical separation is very recently exemplified through the launch of the Diploma, and in particular for our project, the *Advanced Diploma*, which is a Level 3 "framework" qualification containing a combination of academic and vocational components. A hybrid curriculum is envisaged as a combination of academic and vocational education. As we have found from our desk-based analysis and empirical research, creating hybridity in the English context has been a longstanding challenge.

The Advanced Diploma offered a new attempt at providing a hybrid programme, however our evidence suggested that it was often perceived as overly complex and demanding to deliver as students were required to move between different sorts of providers to participate in different elements of their programmes. This also raised issues about the diverse terms and conditions available to teachers

and tutors employed by the various institutions involved. The pedagogy of the Advanced Diploma was designed primarily to appeal to young people desiring a more practical and participatory approach to teaching and learning compared with the more didactic approach associated with a solely academic programme of A Levels or a more specialized vocational pathway[4].

The hybrid approach reflected in the curricular organisation of the Advanced Diploma contrasts with the approach associated with the *BTEC*[5] *National suite of qualifications* (the most popular full-time post-16 Level 3 pathway other than the A Level route), which are more clearly positioned as vocational programmes. Edexcel, the awarding body responsible for these programmes states on its website that they

> give learners the knowledge, understanding and skills that they need to prepare for employment. The qualifications also provide career development opportunities for those already in work, and through articulation to HE, degree and professional development programmes provide progression opportunities within the same cognate or related areas of study within universities and other institutions.

It goes on to indicate that "on successful completion of a BTEC National qualification, a learner can progress to or within employment and/or continue their study in the same, or related vocational area"[6].

It is important to make clear that, in curricular terms, BTEC Nationals (and similar vocational qualifications such as provided and awarded by OCR)[7] do not include general academic subjects that

4 The new Diploma initiative was launched, promoted and heavily invested in by the previous Labour government but take up by schools and colleges as well as by young people has been limited. The current Coalition government elected in May 2010 has signalled that it will not be actively supporting the qualification's ongoing development and so it is expected to "wither on the vine".

5 BTEC (Business and Technology Education Council) is one of the major awarding bodies in the VET sector in the UK.

6 Accessed from <http://www.edexcel.com/migrationdocuments/BTEC%20Nationals%20from%202010/BTEC-Nationals-Electrical-Electronic-Engineering-spec.pdf> (19 August 2011).

7 OCR stands for "Oxford, Cambridge and Royal Society of Arts Examinations" and is a merger of traditional examination bodies in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

are not cognate with the vocational focus of the programme[8]. Hence, in contrast to the vocational college hybrid routes in Austria or (to a lower degree) Germany, the programme does not include languages, science and social sciences. Nonetheless, the programme attracts UCAS[9] tariff points which are broadly equivalent to A Levels and, as such, the qualification provides access to HE, albeit only in a cognate area.

Our evidence suggested that the pedagogy experienced by students following BTEC National programmes, was considered to be more the practical and "hands-on" and more student-centred than the A Level alternative learning. In addition, assessment was assignment-based and unlike A Levels there were no examinations. From the perspective of teachers, the programmes enabled greater flexibility and innovation than would be the case with A Level qualifications. The social partnership model that is more common in continental Europe has not historically been a feature of the English system (Ryan 2001). With the example again of the Advanced Diploma it is striking therefore that the pedagogy and curricula were developed in Diploma Development Partnerships, which was an attempt to involve representatives from HE and business. Nevertheless, our evidence revealed the tensions which surfaced during that process. This consultative approach was in some contrast to the way that qualifications had been implemented historically, and the aspiration to satisfy the different stakeholder needs was challenging.

Finally, we noted that the length and intensity of Level 3 type programmes is weaker in England than in the project's partner countries. Full-time courses typically last two years (16–18) and full-time attendance (contact hours) is considered to be only 15–16 hours per week.

8 For example, a BTEC National Diploma in Electrical and Electronic Engineering requires students to take a prescribed number of core and optional units but all these are relevant and related to the vocational area. Core units include: Health and Safety in the engineering workplace, Mathematics for engineering technicians, electrical and electronic principles; there are a wide range of option units including, engineering drawing for technicians and electrical technology.

9 UCAS stands for "Universities and Colleges Admissions Service" and is the admission service for students applying to university and college, including post-16 education in the UK.

Labour market and educational market

HQ in the context of youth unemployment (16–24) at over 20 % offer the potential to increase their function as a means to support the transition from education to work. The English system has its employment and education "logics", but also a poorly-defined middle-ground where HQ offer the potential to meet the needs of a group of young people who otherwise risk falling between the two paradigms. Turning to the issue of full access to the labour market, we found that the extent to which qualifications and pathways provided currency for those entering skilled employment was determined by the conditions that underpin the English transition system[10]. As such, the value attached to qualifications was usually contingent and dynamic.

Within our study, *Advanced Apprenticeship*, firmly associated with an employment logic, was the nearest of our contenders to meeting the criteria for full access to the labour market by providing the clearest pathway to skilled employment within an occupational field. However, the key factor determining the value attached to completion of the programme was sectoral and occupational differences and traditions. The challenge for most Advanced Apprenticeship programmes was that the associated Level 3 qualifications often were not acceptable for entry to HE.

The emerging HE market with higher fees as well as a growing emphasis on "employability" offers the potential to increase the availability of hybrid undergraduate programmes to strengthen links with the labour market. The achievement of a hybrid or dual qualification through participation in HE could help give these students a competitive edge over their peers as they seek jobs in an era of very high youth unemployment. However, the significantly increasing

10 These include factors such as the degree of labour market regulation by occupational sector; the extent to which there is a well-established apprenticeship route in the sector; the changing extent of educational stratification; aspects of the market-based system including the existence of private awarding bodies competing for business from educational institutions and students; lack of programme standardisation; wide-ranging sectoral and occupational differences; and, the extent of employer involvement in the development and validation of qualifications, and in providing work placements.

cost of HE for the individual in the context of the current economic and employment climate are raising questions about the benefits and returns of university education for the individual, the tax-payer and wider society.

Political priorities and decisions

The dominance of Conservative education policies within the present Coalition government suggests an emphasis on "tradition" and consequently a reinforcement of the primacy of academic qualifications. Looking at Level 3 qualifications more generally, curricula and pedagogy are subject to political influence. At the time of writing, the Coalition's policy direction is towards more "traditional" curricula and assessment. For example, the "EBacc" (English Baccalaureate) as a more academic measure of success at Level 2 has recently been introduced, and more emphasis is being placed on the attainment of high grades at A Level for university entrance rather than the use of UCAS points. There is also strong pressure on the awarding bodies to introduce examinations into their assessment regimes for vocational programmes.

The long-term policy of widening participation to HE is likely to continue, and is part of the Coalition government's rhetoric. However, there is concern that the tripling of tuition fees to £9,000 per year for Bachelor degrees at most universities will deter many young people from modest backgrounds from participating. The incoming arrangements for financial support for students including loans and bursaries are complex and hard to understand. One consequence is that young people from families with fewer resources and less experience of university are more likely to apply to less prestigious institutions offering cheaper degrees. "HE" looks set to become broadly conceived and flexible, to encompass new modes of study (for example two year accelerated undergraduate programmes, greater flexibility in terms of how and when students learn, and funding for part-time students). The corollary to this is that it is also likely to become (even) more segmented and stratified than it is currently.

Relationship between HE and VET and the issue of the currency value of HQ

HQ have an opportunity to establish themselves as a route to HE within a more diverse (but segmented) HE landscape, particularly as students are increasingly looking to attain degrees likely to facilitate their ability to get jobs. Yet their currency is highly context dependent as discussed in our final report. However, in summary, currently HQ contenders have relatively weak currency for access to HE compared with A Levels and also relatively weak currency for access to the labour market, with the exception of Advanced Apprenticeship.

Best practice – progression from the work-based route

The employers we interviewed valued cost-effectiveness and flexibility. They were keen to work with HE providers as joint partners rather than have to accept rigidly-designed programmes, which did not reflect their business goals. From the perspective of employers, the nuanced distinctions between elite universities, e.g. the "Russell Group", and the more vocationally-oriented universities were not seen as important. What is most important was collaboration and understanding of their requirements. "Expansive" Advanced Apprenticeships (Fuller & Unwin 2008) which include qualifications with currency for entrance to HE, and that have systematic off-the-job as well as on-the-job training are more likely to provide a platform for progression to HE, than their restrictive counterparts which include little opportunity for learning off-the-job at college and have weak credential currency.

Best practice – progression from the school-based route

From the perspective of tutors teaching on full-time BTEC National programmes, best practice is about creating an authentic work experience to go alongside school or college-based study. Tutors worked to enrich the core programmes and encouraged students to volunteer

for and participate in related activities. For example, BTEC Sport students were encouraged to pursue additional work-related awards such as sports coaching. Best practice was hard to define as a universal idea, but was better understood as local and individual responses to a particular vocational area. The availability of work experience and work placement opportunities was created via well-established local networks between educational institutions and employers.

National and international messages

There are various factors in the recent English policy landscape that could offer a "moment" for policy reform and the development of HQ. They include the Wolf Review (Wolf 2011) and the response to it by government, both of which appear to support the concept of a route which stands for progression to HE and to the labour market. The envisaged raising of the participation age to 17 in 2013 and 18 in 2015 creates a new challenge for policy and practice to generate high quality and value programmes that will appeal to young people, HE institutions and employers.

Currently, there is a large minority of young people who are not pursuing (solely) academic qualifications and are not in Apprenticeships. There is a need to develop high quality provision for this group. An important indicator of quality could be the capacity of programmes to lead either to dual qualifications or an integrated hybrid outcome. Currently, many Advanced Apprenticeships have a weak record in facilitating progression to HE because of the limited currency (for accessing HE) attached to the associated qualifications. There is a need to review the structure and content of Advanced Apprenticeship to help build their currency and educational value. In particular, there may be lessons for England to learn from the Austrian initiative, "Apprenticeship plus A Levels".

In order to create high quality and high value hybrid or combination programmes at Level 3, it is necessary to review the current concept of what counts as full-time study and how long they should be. Insights from the experiences of our partner countries have highlighted the limited length and intensity of programmes in England

and the consequences in terms of quality and outcomes. The comparisons suggest that the development of a strong hybrid model is likely to require a longer and/or a more intensive mode of attendance. There is not currently a well-understood concept of quality associated with the "middle space" in the English transition system. Weak standardisation has consequences for the level of trust in the system and between the stakeholders, and for the diverse experiences of students. Policy makers need to rethink the pathways being offered to young people and make clear that these cohere neatly with either an education or employment logic. It is not clear that leaving this "space" to the market will generate more consistent high quality provision to young people, and the institutions (HE institutions and employers) "receiving" them, at the end of their programmes. This includes "branding" of qualifications and attributing an unmistakable quality to the relevant programmes[11].

Nature of recommendations depending on the concept of best practice

The best practice we identified during our empirical research was local and individually-motivated. There is potential to share that practice and for relationships between the very disparate stakeholders to be strengthened as a result. It becomes clear that it is the expansion of government supported apprenticeship programmes which would need to be based on a shared understanding of quality and of best practice in each sector. However, the English condition reveals that we need to recognize that the relationship between education and the labour market context is based on a legacy of laissez-faire, voluntarist

11 The authors of the English report maintain that a more powerful branding of all those qualifications that are "other" to GCSEs and A levels could hold the key to HQ longevity – for example, through greater visibility of student achievement and a recognition that only a minority of young people are part of the much-hyped "A Level results days" in August. Besides, the review of the UCAS tariff should ensure that it continues to include a wide range of qualifications at Level 3, and that makes it easy for all candidates, not just those pursuing A Levels, to find out the value, in terms of points, associated with their qualifications.

tradition. Without a radical rethinking of the system, best practice cannot be imposed, but will only develop through the accumulation of trust between stakeholders involved in specific types of provision.

The case of Germany: policy implications and policy recommendations with respect to hybridity against the background of an "overmighty" dual system

Due to a high degree of employer involvement in the context of a "coordinated market economy" and a "collectivist training regime, which is linked to portable and certified occupational skills" (Trampusch 2009, pp. 375ff.), Germany is an outstanding example for an "apprenticeship country" (Harris & Deissinger 2003). Its institutionalisation as a dual system of VET has traditionally received broad acceptance among companies, since *apprenticeships* represent the most important non-academic route in the post-compulsory sector for those German school leavers seeking for a formal qualification outside the HE system. Formal qualifications are based on "skilled training occupations", and the dual system recruits more than 50% of 16-to-19-year-olds (from different school backgrounds including higher secondary education), providing for a generally high level of formal intermediate skills in the German labour market. Unlike in the UK or in France, where they only stand for a marginal sector within the VET system, apprenticeships exist in nearly all branches of the German economy, including the professions and parts of the civil service.

With respect to HQ, however, the strong position and status of the dual system can be seen as an obstacle – with implications for the process of "Europeanisation", which continues to pose challenges for the German VET system. As the German education system generally is structured along "sectors", such as school education, VET and HE, the "self-reference" of all these sub-systems is quite strong. In so far Germany shares, though not so manifestly, the problem with other countries that "education" and "training" (and with it the sphere of VET) are not inter-related in the sense that there is a no-

tion of equivalence and a clear perception of progression between them in the understanding typical for the Anglo-saxon "competence" approach (Deissinger 2013). This obviously has implications for the boundaries and obstacles set for the introduction of HQ in the German education system. The following aspects point to conditions for HQ that are only marginally existent in the German educational architecture so far.

Equivalence of vocational and general education as a basic prerequisite for hybridity

The widespread assumption of disparity between the two sub-systems "general" and "vocational" education, which exists in Germany despite its strong apprenticeship system, has to be overcome and needs to be replaced by a consciousness of equivalence. The majority of the interviewees in our empirical research regard this as a first and fundamental reform step for the vocational training system if HQ were to be introduced. However, looking back to the history of education, the lack of equivalence appears as a major obstacle as it cannot be realised by simply introducing new courses, new qualifications or new curricula.

Against this background, the demand for a social consciousness of equivalence of vocational and general education has to be reflected in a didactical and curricular perspective and requires suitable standards for the competences that are needed for both spheres. Hence, the competences which extend the maturity for a job by an ability to study have to be discussed and defined on a curricular level. In this context uniformity is not supposed to be of higher value than similarity in terms of the highest possible convergence of the vocational curriculum and the curriculum of general education. It is obvious that this is a problem which contains a kind of paradox since vocational competences are not automatically apt for being used in an HE context. In Germany, the term "Berufliche Handlungskompetenz" (vocational action competence) underlines this understanding, which is closely linked to the apprenticeship system and its broad understanding of "occupations".

Preserving the qualification function of apprenticeship training when combining qualifications for the labour market and entitlements

Apprenticeship in the dual system is virtually exclusively functional in relation to portable labour market relevant qualifications that are both socially and economically accepted. This explains why education "on top" is rarely part of German initial training programmes. In this context, companies traditionally have voiced their concern as a major argument against HQ – a facet which becomes understandable when looking to the German apprenticeship tradition, which has always kept the state's responsibility and the didactical part of the vocational school in an inferior (though not unnecessary) role and position in relation to the workplace as the "crucial" learning site. So there seems to be an obvious conflict between the qualification function of the dual system and a more explicit "certification" and/or "progression" dimension. It is the dual system, representing the first of these roles, which in international terms traditionally has, and still is considered to be a "premium product" of Germany's educational architecture[12].

When it comes to the time dimension, two basic scenarios for a realisation of hybridity were mentioned by our stakeholder interviewees. One argument points to a university entrance certificate being realised within the dual system without the requirement of additional general studies. This claim, however, requires a high degree of equivalence of vocational and general contents. Some stakeholders consider this kind of identity between general and vocational education as fundamental for necessary reform steps, while with respect to the curricular level they think more pragmatically: additional general contents need to be incorporated into the existing training programmes even though this inevitably would mean using additional time for general education. Approximation between the curricula of general and vocational education is obviously seen as a prerequisite for hybridity – although educational reform in the 1970s clearly failed to prove that vocational and general education have the same pedagogical logic.

12 The fact that countries like Spain or even the US try to take steps towards a "dual" kind of training proves this attractiveness of the German training system.

Against this background, for the purpose of making transition between vocational education and scientific work at university smoother and, at the same time, maintaining quality standards of and in universities in the long run, courses with a bridging/transition function (Brückenkurse) could be regarded as a realistic step. This would be an alternative to implementing academic preparation into an existing vocational programme. Furthermore, overcoming what may be called a "jungle" of various measures for individual progression, assisted studies could contribute to a successful transition from apprenticeship into polytechnic or university education. The question is which support exactly young people need who want to find their way to university via apprenticeship training or the field of vocational practice. The latter progression route is now increasingly open (e.g. for master craftsmen) while direct access from the dual system into HE is still extremely rare and depends on the individual federal state.

Strengthening the qualification character of full-time VET courses as a basic perequisite for hybridity

HQ in Germany are now more present in full-time VET which, however, has always had an inferior status when it comes to qualifications for employment. Besides the interests of employers to prevent the development of a "competitive system of qualifications", one result of our research has been the insight that there is also resistance among vocational schools against being under the thumb of a too strong influence emanating from enterprises, since vocational (part-time) schools historically have always claimed a special "educational purpose" (Bildungsauftrag) for themselves.

In order to increase the value of qualifications in full-time vocational schools in general, it might be considered important to enhance the practical relevance of these courses (e.g. by implementing "practice firms" in vocational colleges or other higher vocational full-time schools). This could lead to some kind of convergence between practical workplace training in the dual system and school-based vocational learning (see the Austrian experiences). To create

an environment for structured learning through theory and practice, it seems necessary to equip full-time schools with modern technology and good workshops and/or to offer work placements in companies. While so far dual vocational training and studying towards a university (or polytechnic) entrance certificate by undertaking a *vocational full-time programme in an intermediate or higher vocational school* (Berufskolleg, Höhere Berufsfachschule, Berufliches Gymnasium) have been detached from each other, an integration of skill formation on the one hand, and the aspiration towards an entitlement for HE on the other, in both vocational sub-systems (apprenticeship training and vocational full-time schools) would be a step to bring about equality of esteem between the two markedly segregated areas of learning. At the moment, with stakeholders protecting the exclusive status of the dual system consistently, this scenario appears rather unrealistic. Full-time VET, on the other hand, apart from some exclusive occupational courses, normally means continuing school education, preparing for an apprenticeship or striving for an HE entrance qualification – which can be "hybrid" or "non-hybrid". Notwithstanding these facts, strengthening the qualification function of vocational education in those schools that have some kind of occupational orientation certainly puts strain on a more "educational" curriculum which is seen as crucial for an academic career.

Convincing companies and adolescents of the potential of hybrid qualifications

Because policy makers in Germany are not getting tired of claiming that the apprenticeship system has to be strengthened, while at the same time insisting that progression into HE ought to be pushed, the "multi-functionality" of vocational full-time schools in general has to be seen in a new light. As their function at the moment seems to be strongly linked to entry into HE through traditional entitlements, including "A Levels" (Abitur), rather than to the purpose of delivering labour market qualifications, the notion of hybridity could open up new ways of thinking and – though maybe only in the long run –

trigger potential reform steps. However, when it comes to full-time vocational education, research has shown that with regard to these schools, which already offer HQ (especially towards polytechnic studies), companies have steadily denied the value of these qualifications being at par with the dual system (Deissinger & Ruf 2006).

Therefore, in order to make HQ work, the target group of potential graduates with double qualifying degrees have to be convinced of their value as a highly potential and sustainable option. Besides, it seems even more important (as the first aspect conditions the second one) to convince companies by helping them to reduce their reservations. Against the background of an increasing demand for skilled personnel on the side of companies, hybridity seems a way of helping balance these interests with those of the government, who wants to rise the numbers of HE students. However, it is not only necessary to convince companies of the long-term potential and the positive effects of higher qualifications, but to develop framework conditions which make sure that trainees who undertake hybrid studies stay in their companies in the long run.

Best practice: a German-Austrian comparison

As to the identification of best-practice approaches for HQ, there are a number of empirical facts that the Austrian system of VET typifies a well-working HQ model. This becomes especially clear once comparing the two German-speaking countries. It is the full-time VET system in Austria which is commonly described as quite successful and functional compared to the German one (Deissinger 2012). One reason for this appraisal is that it is as strong in terms of intakes as its "competitor", the dual apprenticeship system (Aff 2006, p. 19). Austria is one of the countries in Europe which already offer educational pathways that produce HQ within a still strongly differentiated educational system.

In contrast, full-time vocational schools in Germany offering HQ normally only qualify for entrance into a polytechnic and are held in low esteem, also compared to those which offer "A Levels"

to students, such as the "Commercial High Schools" (Wirtschaftsgymnasien). From a German perspective, the analysis of the Austrian VET system and its educational pathways is valuable for many reasons. In contrast to the German education system, the attractiveness and success of Austrian vocational full-time schools clearly stand out. Austria demonstrates that offering a fully applicable HQ, even within a strongly differentiated education system, gives benefit to all educational pathways. It seems to be relevant to point out that Austrian vocational qualifications outside the dual system are portable on the labour market, i.e. widely acknowledged and valued by companies, which renders (even) the lower vocational full-time pathway (BMS) the quality of a real and viable (and sometimes even better) alternative to the apprenticeship system, although occupational areas in full-time VET are generally less specific than, e.g., those in the craft sector, where apprenticeships are still quite widely used as pathways of initial skill formation and companies have a major interest and say.

Quite a number of the German stakeholders whose statements are documented in the German Country Report II are of the opinion that the aspect of appreciation and estimation is a beneficial and highly relevant issue which means that they think that aspects of the Austrian system could be copied, or at least seriously looked at, in the case of Germany. Stakeholders who pick up this aspect, however, are aware that the "reputation" of any vocational qualification, including apprenticeship qualifications issued by the chambers, depends on the acceptance by companies in the first place. As the economy in Germany, though still highly industrial and craft-based, is changing towards a more "knowledge-based" one, companies might become more inclined to hire employees with both a vocational and academic background. The case of the "vocational academies", now called "dual HE institutions" in the federal state of Baden-Württemberg is a well-working example for "linking the two worlds" on the HE level (Deissinger 2000). However, it would not be wise to (further) develop full-time qualifications which have no relevance for the labour market since they are bound to lose out against the dual system with its chamber certificates. With regard to the issue "what practice demands and what the requirements are" a

number of stakeholders state that a discourse, including academics, representatives from companies and chambers, as well as trade unions, would be necessary. At the moment, it seems clear that the "dominance" of the dual system in Germany (Deissinger, Heine & Ott 2011) continues undermining the viability of HQ, and with it the labour market function of full-time VET.

An orientation towards the Austrian two-pillar model could also, in the case of Germany and its dual system, lead to a clearer and more functional differentiation within the apprenticeship system with respect to curricula, i.e. to a more visible distinction between more theoretical courses on the one hand – requiring school-based learning and knowledge-based instruction to a large extent – and practically orientated apprenticeship programmes – using the workplace as the major learning site – on the other. However, such a differentiation bears the danger of "parcelling" the apprenticeship system, as one of the facets of the German system is the unquestioned formal equivalence of occupations trained on the basis of the German Vocational Training Act. Furthermore, the rejection of most social partners concerning modularisation of vocational training in general, and of apprenticeship schemes in particular, is closely connected with this issue. The "vocational principle", giving distinction to Germany's "apprenticeship culture" as *the* "organising principle" (Deissinger 1998) hereby still may be seen as the most relevant stabilising parameter within the VET system.

Not all of the German stakeholders we interviewed do agree with the opinion that the Austrian model might be considered best practice and therefore be used as a blueprint for reforming Germany's VET system. Some respondents mention the deficiencies of practical training within a school-based VET environment. Full-time courses hereby obviously are associated with the flaw that they bear the danger of reducing the applicability of competences on the labour market. The interviewees who hold this view are convinced that adolescents who get their training in a school need a longer period of vocational adjustment to reach the level of competences and employability skills than those who have undertaken training in the dual system. In line with this kind of thinking, which is didactically motivated, employers' associations, chambers and training

companies fear an increasing influence of the state within the system of VET, and they also maintain that there is a real danger that training courses might be artificially prolonged. The political aim to preserve the traditional regulation power within the traditional system of self-administration and the belief that workplaces are the "right" places for learning, hereby merge into one argument, which still may be seen as one of the most stable paradigms within Germany's VET debate.

In this context, a counter argument points to the pedagogical insight that vocational employability orientation and employability skills undoubtedly can be delivered and gained outside a "realistic" vocational environment. This view is inconsistent with the often found ideological discussion in Germany. However, as already pointed out, labour market segmentation in Austria seems to be more clearly in line with qualifications delivered in the full-time VET system.

The case of Austria proves that a well-functioning apprenticeship system does not need to be in conflict with demanding VET courses leading to HQ and hereby contributing to maintaining a highly trained workforce. The two German-speaking countries do not just differ on account of their institutional diversity in the VET system and the relevance of various modes of vocational training (on-the-job/dual and off-the-job/school-based respectively), but also in their respective reform strategies which seem to be influenced by the European agenda in different ways. It seems that Austria is "more prepared" for complying with this agenda, in particular when it comes to hybridity, although, as Trampusch argues, "in Austria, Europeanization happens as institutional change by default" rather than as a deliberate "proactive" reform process (Trampusch 2009, pp. 386ff.). The reason might be that institutionalisation of VET here already bears a "more European face".

Synopsis

It may be stated that differences between the four countries as to HQ are quite substantial, and they seem, at least in the case of Germany and Austria, dependent on the role apprenticeships play in the VET system. In Denmark, the dual system also appears to be an "explaining factor" for the absence of hybridity on a larger scale so far, although, as experiences with the new HQ programme are quite new, a final evaluation seems impossible. England, on the other hand, certainly has – with its "framework" concept – the best formal pre-conditions for establishing HQ on a broader basis. However, even here (and quite understandably when looking at educational traditions) HQ find it difficult to adopt a more or less equivalent status in relation to historically established general qualifications. Also, in the case of England, a VET system with a comparatively contingent apprenticeship system, does only marginally provide a climate where the trust in VET in general has succeeded in taking roots (Fuller & Unwin 2011).

The following table tries to illustrate the differences. The rating is not meant to place one country on a higher level in terms of an overall evaluation of the VET system. Each country has its own traditions, its own political logic and its system of stakeholders who have a say when it comes to (vocational) education policy. Therefore the table has more a comparative than an evaluative function.

Summary of Results and Outlook

Country	*Most prominent types of "Hybrid Qualifications"*	*Rating*	*Comment*
Austria	Berufsbildende Höhere Schulen (full-time vocational academies), e.g.: HAK, HLW, HLT, HTL	****	According to the authors of the Austrian Country Reports, the entire educational track of the vocational colleges can be quoted as an example of best practice. In no other European country are HQ that prevalent and seem to have such a good reputation. Their success is obviously closely linked to a labour market which is widely open for these qualifications. Furthermore, graduates can study all subjects at universities.
Denmark	The EUX programme	not yet possible	According to the authors of the Danish Country Reports, the Danish educational system has not until 2010 offered full HQ. This is changing now as a new legal framework was established in the summer of 2010, the EUX programme. The quality and functionality of the new hybrid programme so far cannot be validated.
England	BTEC National Diploma	**(*)	According to the authors of the English Country Reports, the BTEC National Diploma can make a realistic claim to be considered as a hybrid qualification. However, the authors conclude that it might be seen as fulfilling a weaker definition of HQ by, for example, providing access only to some HE institutions and to cognate subjects and courses. As to the labour market these HQ appear to be valued as entry level qualifications by some employers in some sectors, including those offering Apprenticeships.
Germany	Full-time VET, e.g. the "Berufskolleg" (vocational college) in Baden-Württemberg	*(*)	According to the authors of the German Country Reports, full-time VET, rather than the dual system (apprenticeship), provides the framework for HQ. However, even the function of the vocational college is nearly exclusively entry into HE (polytechnics only) rather than delivering portable labour market relevant qualifications. VET in Germany, especially apprenticeship with its strong labour market orientation, is still fundamentally detached from HE.

However, the case of Austria is interesting and may be considered as a "role model" since here vocational education and academic education are closer to each other than in the other countries of our project – although the country's education policy also pays tribute to the dual system as a traditional model of vocational training. It may be stated that the more decidedly a vocational course is associated with

theoretical learning, without losing its links to the labour market, the more likely HQ can be established as an attractive option both for school leavers and for companies. On the other hand, the Austrian case also shows that labour markets have to be in line with educational structures. Research on the German counterpart reveals that there is great scepticism when it comes to putting the dual apprenticeship system into another perspective, i.e. "making it more academic". The case of England is illustrating in another way: Here companies focus on training in the workplace, and against this background formal HQ still have an acceptance problem, in particular when it comes to university entrance. In Denmark, as already referred to, the so-called "EUX" track within the education system represents a fundamental reform in the face of changing economic conditions although it still needs to prove its functionality and attractiveness on a wider scale.

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