

Apprenticeship Cultures – a comparative view

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Introduction

There is no doubt among scholars engaged in the field of comparative research that vocational training systems are determined by a specific 'philosophy' or 'intrinsic logic' which gives them the character of 'black boxes' as they have to be understood 'in relation to other societal institutions' including the labour market, the economy, the system of industrial relations and of course the system of government (Raffe, 1998, p391). With this premise in mind, looking at vocational training in a merely institutional manner by using the state function as the crucial *tertium comparationis* [for example Greinert, 1988] reduces the potential of gaining insight into what may be called the 'training culture' of a given country. The title of this paper refers to 'apprenticeship cultures' and therefore to a specific learning arrangement in the area of vocational training which, despite its medieval origins and 'old-fashioned' terminology, seems to remain a pivotal topic of national and international training policies. This is especially true for Anglophone countries such as the UK or Australia where apprenticeships have been revitalised or reframed in recent years due to dissatisfaction with both school-based skill formation as well as traditional on-the-job training (Ryan, 2001; Canning, 2001; Deissinger, 2003; Harris & Deissinger, 2003; Deissinger, 2004a).

Despite a number of 'modern' intentions backing or promoting apprenticeships, societies cannot ignore the 'historical character' of their respective vocational training systems. This implies that there is a cultural foundation for the general significance given both to apprenticeship as an institutional solution towards the problem of skill formation as well as to the interaction or even interdependence between the apprenticeship system and the systems of general and higher education respectively. In Germany, it is an apparent phenomenon that the understanding of a separate vocational pathway as 'unique' and valuable in itself is a trait which sets the country apart from most other European societies (with the exception of Austria and Switzerland). This unique positioning, however, has traditionally provoked criticism with respect to the organisation of vocational training and general education 'according to separate criteria and systems of assessment' including 'limited possibilities for progression between them' (Young, 2003, p228). On the other hand, it may be argued that academic and (non-academic) vocational pathways, in the German case, are well rooted within distinct but interdependent subsystems and that their mutual interaction obviously contributes to stabilising the 'vocational track' in a stronger way than in other countries. Despite serious problems related to the training market (Federal Ministry of Education and Research, 2003) there are no signs that the German apprenticeship system representing this strong belief in the importance of vocational qualifications has entered a stage of degradation.

If one looks at the respective apprenticeship cultures in the UK and Germany, both represent an 'updated past' as they follow the principles of vocational training emerging from the time of the Industrial Revolution (Deissinger, 1994). In the UK, then, vocational training in the majority of cases meant acquiring qualifications through on-the-job training complemented by the voluntary attendance of evening classes in continuation schools. Industrial training never became successfully institutionalised within the national educational system – with clear implications for the present policy and practice of co-operation between the different 'learning sites' (Deissinger, 2004b). The division of education and training typical of the Victorian Age paralysed the development of educational opportunities for the working classes and helped to create a social pattern of industrial training being that of 'boy labourers' rather than of 'boy learners' (Tawney, 1909). Whereas in Germany the state emerged as the leading force in promoting vocational training, in the UK, due to the successes of industrialisation achieved without significant contributions from the educational system, there was a strong belief that 'preparation for production was best given on the job rather than in formal education' (Child et al., 1983, p73). The general aversion to state intervention and the reluctance on the government's side to become involved with matters linked to skill formation in particular also stifled efforts to institutionalise the day continuation school on a compulsory basis. In Germany, due to a decidedly corporatist approach to vocational training and to the successful pedagogical justification of the necessity to offer compulsory part-time education to apprentices and young workers, industrial training became based on the traditional notion of *Beruf or vocation* (Deissinger, 1998). This probably explains the major difference between Germany and the UK (Deissinger, 1999), since it touches the cultural as well as the pedagogical dimension of vocational training.

It is therefore justified to use the term 'apprenticeship culture' to describe both pedagogical efforts and institutional arrangements in the area of vocational training. Against the background of complexity of the issue the analytical framework used in this article refers to three dimensions of what constitutes an apprenticeship culture (Deissinger, 1995):

- The first dimension refers to the *institutional pattern of vocational training*, including the various responsibilities of public and private providers, the legal framework, the 'learning sites' involved and the financial issue. This institutional or organisational dimension also brings into focus whether and to what extent a given country makes use of apprenticeships at all and how the apprenticeship system works.
- The second dimension refers to learning processes within this framework as well as to the *intentions underlying the process of skill formation*. This, of course, includes the nature and quality of training or learning regulations and the issue of their mandatory or non-mandatory character.
- The third dimension refers to the *relationship or interaction between the vocational training system and correlated systems*, in particular the system of (pre-vocational) school education and the system of higher education, including the issue of parity of esteem between different pathways into skilled employment.

The following reflections refer to the first and second dimension without systematically distinguishing between them since they are interlinked and intertwined with each other. Hereby a special focus is devoted to the obviously different meaning and understanding of the 'vocational principle' and the notion of 'competence' in Germany and the UK. Other facets, such as the vocational full-time schools in Germany or the system of General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs) in England and Wales, will not be discussed in this paper.

Patterns of Vocational Training: Initial Training in the UK and Germany:

• The 'Vocational Principle' as the Cornerstone of Apprenticeships in the German Dual System

In the perception of external observers, Germany is a country where 'firms are distinguished by a very high proportion of the workforce having intermediate level qualifications' (Steedman, 1998, p81; Marsden & Ryan, 1995). The reason for this is that vocational training mostly occurs in the Dual System (Greinert, 1994; Zabeck, 1985; Raddatz, 1983) which functions as the major non-academic route³ for German school leavers by giving them formal access to the labour market as skilled workers, craftsmen or clerks (Bynner & Roberts, 1991). The system recruits some 60 per cent of 16 to 19-year-olds and contributes to limiting the number of unskilled employees to a constantly low proportion in the German labour market (Büchtemann, Schupp & Soloff, 1993, pp510 f.; Greinert, 1994, p116). Unlike in the UK or France, where they form a marginal sector within the vocational training systems (Gospel, 1995), dual apprenticeships exist in nearly all branches of the German economy including the professions and parts of the civil service.

The function of the Dual System unequivocally refers to initial training of school leavers in a given range of 'declared trades' or 'recognised training occupations' (Deissinger, 2001a). Although the dualism of 'learning sites' and legal responsibilities certainly is the striking feature of this 'German system' of vocational training (Greinert, 1994), its working principles also comprise at least three more aspects:

- Initial training in the Dual System is a well-understood and socially accepted pathway into employment as it follows a traditional pattern deeply enshrined in the ancient mode of apprenticeship (Deissinger, 1994). This means that training is workplace-led and predominantly practical by stressing the importance of work experience during the training period. It also means that the system works in accordance with skill requirements defined 'around the workplace' (Harney, 1985; Deissinger, 1998).
- Despite its traditional basis and long history, the Dual System is determined by the involvement of the state with regard to the nature and quality of occupational standards as well as to legal conditions underlying apprenticeship training (Raggatt, 1988; Deissinger, 1996; Schmidt, 2003, p307). The German 'training culture' (Brown & Evans, 1994) is based on the notion that an apprenticeship should be based on an underpinning pedagogical understanding which sets it apart from 'normal work'.

3 Due to the "three-tier" school system (Ertl, 2000), access into higher education is lower in Germany than in most other European countries. Currently, 1.94 million young people are enrolled as students in the German higher education system (with 70 per cent studying at a university) as against some 1.62 million in the Dual System of initial vocational training.

- Since the state's function is to secure quality standards with respect to in-company training in a predominantly formal manner other social groups have a major say in the Dual System. This means that public, private and semi-private institutions work together by using long-established modes of cooperation within the system and that employers and unions normally take the initiative with respect to training regulations and their revision or modernisation (Benner, 1984; Deissinger, 2001a; Streeck et al., 1987).

The specific 'vocational' or 'occupational' character of training is reflected through the structural features of the Dual System. This orientation in fact can be traced back to the legal restitution of the 'master apprenticeship' and the development of the 'vocational character' of the further training schools around 1900 (Blankertz, 1969, pp119 ff.; Deissinger, 1994; Greinert, 1994, pp22 ff.). This historical re-invention of the 'principle of self-administration' turned out as the starting point of a consolidation and universalisation process which at the beginning of the 20th century also incorporated industrial and commercial training, thereby creating a general institutional principle for the division of labour and the assignment of competences (Schütte, 1992; Harney, 1987, p180).

Against this background, the German meaning and understanding of the *vocational principle as realised in the dual apprenticeship system* refers to a specific quality of didactical as well as institutional arrangements which define the 'application requirements' for skilled labour (Kutscha, 1992, p537) through a system of occupations bridging the spheres of training and work (Deissinger, 1998; Beck, Brater & Daheim, 1980):

- Occupations are seen as 'more or less complex combinations of special achievements' which relate to formal qualifications typical of a given trade. Therefore they have been created in order to correspond with the functional requirements of the division of labour (Zabeck, 1991, p559). Each occupation has to be integrally structured and relatively job-independent. Both the branch and the individual value of the qualification obtained at the end of the training process represent 'special qualities' both in relation to other occupations and to qualifications in higher education (Beck, Brater & Daheim, 1980, pp20 ff).
- Training occupations function as the starting point as well as the target of the training process and are based on what may be called an 'organisational picture' (Brater, 1981, p32) which is standardised by state statutes and thus significantly removed from the specific character of individual workplaces. The quantity and quality of skills and knowledge to be imparted in the training process are supervised and validated through intermediate and final examinations as well as certified in a way acceptable to the labour market. Apprenticeships hence are closely associated with the notion of homogeneous training courses based on standardised training ordinances (Deissinger, 2001a).

The mandatory contents of a *training ordinance* are specified in the *Vocational Training Act (VTA)* of 1969 [Deissinger, 1996]⁴. According to section 25 VTA it must contain (1) the name of the skilled occupation, (2) the duration of the training period, (3) the skills to be provided by the company in the course of training, (4) a specification of the syllabus 'to be followed for the purpose of imparting the relevant abilities and knowledge', and finally (5) the examination standards. The so-called 'principle of exclusiveness' (section 28 VTA) makes sure that training ordinances represent the only way which leads young people into skilled employment:

'(1) Training for a recognised trainee occupation shall be given only in accordance with the relevant training regulations. (2) Initial training in occupations other than recognised trainee occupations shall not be provided for young persons under 18 years of age unless it is intended to prepare them for a subsequent course of instruction'.

This principle clearly underlines the 'process character' of the German apprenticeship system and its strong focus on the 'input' or 'contents' aspect. The majority of training schemes (currently 350) are so-called 'mono occupations' which do not allow for any kind of specialisation, let alone a differentiation of training time or training contents. It is assumed that a broad basis of elementary vocational qualifications supports a maximum of flexibility and mobility between different workplaces and firms. This concept also becomes evident in the training schemes in the metal and electrical sectors which were issued in the late eighties: specialisation only takes place after an initial training period of normally one year which is common to a whole range of occupations related with each other [Stratmann & Schlösser, 1990, pp266–9]. The current policy of modernisation, however, goes further and tries to dynamically integrate new developments in the world of work – in particular IT competences – into the existing system of vocational training [Müller, Häusler & Sonnek, 1997]. The year 2003 saw the emergence of seven new training occupations and 21 schemes underwent revision procedures⁵.

As already mentioned above, one of the crucial traits of the German apprenticeship system is certainly its *dual character*. Whereas in other European countries, such as the UK, on-the-job training – even under the new Modern Apprenticeship scheme (Ryan, 2001) – is complemented by off-the-job training on a more or less voluntary basis, in Germany it is mandatory. While there has been an ongoing discussion about the 'process character' of vocational training in the UK – including the scope for 'expansive participation' of companies

4 The Vocational Training Act may be viewed as the final stage of a post-war public debate on the degree to which the Dual System as a whole should be submitted to state influence. As a compromise, the Act did not install a new training system including the vocational school, but mainly "consolidated much previous practice under one Act" (Raggatt, 1988, p175). The Vocational Training Act is essentially a specified labour law since its central object is the indenture between the apprentice and the training company.

5 Among the new occupations are the "car mechatronic" and the "investment clerk". Both new technologies and the growing demand for specialisation may be seen as the triggering factors for the creation of such occupations (see www.bibb.de).

in workplace-related training (Senker et al., 2000; Fuller & Unwin, 2003), in Germany the State Education Acts provide an essential element of the legal framework for dual apprenticeships by making sure that school leavers are kept within the educational system. For each training occupation the state education ministries, in line with training regulations under the federal law, work out syllabuses for the vocational and general subjects within a given occupation taught at the part-time vocational schools (Greinert, 1994).

Besides its didactical principles, and its legal and institutional characteristics the German system relies on a functioning training market. The latter 'has the character of a suppliers' market' (Greinert 1994, p80). Once a training contract has been signed this means the *principal financial responsibility of companies for the training process* including, besides training allowances, all direct and indirect costs such as training personnel, machinery, training administration and social insurance contributions. The fact that the 'system is financed principally by employers' (NCVER, 2001, p38) reflects the principle of self-government re-affirmed by law in the late 19th century. Therefore, companies provide training opportunities on a voluntary basis. Training in the craft sector has a particularly strong tradition (Deissinger, 2001b) as some 530,000 young people out of the present total of 1.6 million trained in the Dual System (2002) are apprenticed in a craft company under the supervision of a master craftsman (although with a decreasing tendency)⁶.

Against this background the German apprenticeship system may be viewed as a *system of training* rather than a system of employment in which the wages of apprentices reflect this emphasis, with German apprentices typically paid wages that are far lower than adult rates and apprentice rates in Australia or in the UK (NCVER, 2001, p39; Payne, 1999, p480). Training allowances are the result of collective bargaining but keep attached to the purpose of giving young people a basic start into their working lives without putting too much burden on employers. As the apprenticeship system is seen to be neither part of the school or education system nor a normal sphere of work the 'system reference' is clearly training and recruitment for skilled work. The consequences of such a clear separation of pathways or subsystems of course implies that lots of expectations rest on the Dual System and frictions on the training market can hardly be compensated without additional activities on the side of the state. Among these, activities to promote either external training options or give incentives to employers are paramount (Berger & Walden, 2002). Moreover, the introduction of a training levy seems to become more and more likely as the two ruling parties in the federal government have in principal agreed on its introduction. This new move has to be seen against the background that at the end of September 2003 only 6,500 school leavers out of the still searching 35,000 could be provided with a training opportunity⁷.

6 In terms of the financial burden, companies shoulder the lion's share of training cost: in 2000, companies invested nearly €28 billion into the Dual System. The average training outlay per apprentice is currently rated at €16,435 pa. (Beicht & Walden, 2002). Due to that, the cost argument can be found among the most important reasons which companies report for not entering training. A recent panel survey published by the German Labour Office Research Unit sees the financial aspect of training at nearly 38 per cent, 28.6 per cent of companies say that training is too burdensome and complicated for them, while 12.5 per cent complain about applicants' educational background or social skills.

7 See Federal Ministry of Education and Research, Pressemitteilung 205/2003, 6 November 2003 [Pressedienst@bmbf.bund.de].

German employers, however, have always refused such a legal enforcement of training supply, fearing that this could eventually lead to even fewer training places. Nevertheless, the problems on the training market clearly underline that the Dual System is subject to external risks.

• **Competence-based Training as the Cornerstone of Vocational Training Reform in the UK**

Vocational training in the UK has often been described as a market model (Greinert, 1988, pp146 f.). This means that training takes place in a decentralised, heterogeneous system, characterised by the particular importance of individual firms in the process of skill formation. In contrast to the German system and also following a specific cultural pattern, the system has so far successfully avoided external regulation, especially from the state. Although the government's training acts of 1964 and 1973 highlighted both official recognition of the need for vocational training reform and of the significance of the functional contribution of post-compulsory education and training and the delivery of intermediate skills to youth employment (Raffe, 1987), the UK's 'training culture' is still dominated by a 'system understanding' far removed from combining legal, organisational and didactical guidelines with firm-based qualifying work, as it clearly prefers on-the-job training. Against this background, young people in the UK often experience their training as 'workers' (Bynner & Roberts, 1991, pp238 ff).

Skill formation comes from private and public institutions, ie. it occurs in Colleges of Further Education, through (modern) apprenticeships or via simple, unregulated traineeships offered to young people by individual firms as well as, finally, 'work experience' through state-subsidised youth training programmes, now part of the Modern Apprenticeship scheme (Ryan, 2001). Most of the schemes and programmes in the area of in-company training, however, have traditionally lacked didactical norms and there is no more than an optional basis for alternating training arrangements since in the UK part-time 'vocational school' (or college) attendance is not compulsory. The same applied in particular to traditional ('time-serving') apprenticeships where the craftsman or skilled worker status was automatically conferred at the end of the apprenticeship without any supervision of the learning process or obligatory examinations (Deissinger, 1992, pp12 ff; Aldcroft, 1992, pp55 ff; Payne, 1999, p480).

Against this background, the 1980s marked the beginning of a period of activity and change in the vocational training system, especially in England and Wales (Steedman, 1998). Among the various projects – such as the implementation of state-funded youth training programmes and the expansion of the Further Education sector – the even stronger involvement of companies within a state-supported and partly state-organised system can be seen as one of the cornerstones of that policy. At the same time, vocational training reform aimed at transforming the old 'provider culture', based on 'shared practices' of established institutions such as colleges, trade unions and awarding bodies, into a 'learning culture' based on the individual achievement of competences (Young, 2003, p229)⁸.

8 Young points out that this is the basic assumption underlying the concept of "national qualification frameworks" linked to "that of a learning society which is contrasted with societies of the past in which learning, at least recognised and accredited learning, was largely restricted to initial education and training" (ibid., p224).

In 1986, the system of National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs)⁹ was 'launched with much fanfare' (ibid., p223) to combine the notion of 'legal freedom' and 'company training autonomy' with the idea that training should be linked to more reliable forms of certification of relevant competences (Williams & Raggatt, 1998; Hodgson & Spours, 1997; Wolf, 1995; Aitken, Lilley & Wardman-Browne, 1991; Jessup, 1991). Consequently, NVQs have been looked at as instruments within a coherent 'system' of vocational qualifications to promote the competitiveness of British industry and also as one of the pathways within the National Qualifications Framework. Although it was created mainly for people in work or in-company training, its first aim has been to limit the exploding variety of certificates and denominations of qualifications issued by an 'army' of different examining bodies and to improve the transparency and marketability of vocational qualifications in general. At the same time the system was launched to raise the status and acceptance of vocational training, an intention which is implied in the term 'national'.

The most striking feature of the certification framework made up of NVQs is the definition of outcomes and not that of specified courses (Steadman, 1995). The principle of modularisation gives employers and employees the opportunity to define training needs flexibly and individually and opt for the achievement of competences on various levels. Supporters of the system (Jessup, 1991) point to its function to promote job-ready skills and its general flexibility potential. On the other hand, critics express concern that the system is too bureaucratic, the knowledge factor within the modules is rather under-represented and that take-up among employers is far from satisfactory (Hodgson & Spours, 1997, p15). Apart from the fact that the NVQ system continues to provoke criticism in the scholarly world because of its industry-led nature and its pedagogical deficiencies (e.g. Raggatt & Williams, 1999; Hyland, 1995; Smithers, 1999), it is obvious that – in particular from a didactical point of view – the principles constituting the NVQ system and the inherent *meaning of competence* differ sharply from the German 'vocational principle' (Deissinger, 2002):

- Qualifications and underlying competences can be divided into units (modules) or even elements which the German training schemes do not allow for. Even 'stage training' in the Dual System (Pätzold, 1983) is based on the assumption that the qualification at each level should be uniform and marketable by representing an occupational standard, not just a bundle of specific competences.
- In the NVQ system the focus lies on learning results that are 'independent of the site, the form of provision and the type of pedagogy and curriculum' (Young, 2003, p225). This 'outcome-based approach' to vocational training concentrates on the individual achievement of modularised training objectives¹⁰. In consequence, quality control during the training process is virtually absent and there is no formal examination procedure beyond assessment in the workplace.

9 For differences between England and Wales and Scotland see: Raffe, 1997; Pilz & Deissinger, 2001; Pilz, 2001.

10 Reuling quotes the OECD describing qualifications in the "outcome-based approach" as "major driver, incentive and motivator of learning and the role of individuals is stressed rather than that of teachers, government or other stakeholders" (Reuling, 2002, p15).

Therefore, the competence aspect and the modular aspect constitute crucial components of the British 'training culture'. Quite remarkably, this also applies to Modern Apprenticeships (MA), introduced in 1995, which now can be described as a concept integrating two neo-liberal ideas in the field of vocational training policy emerging in the 1980s, namely *the notion of competence-based training and the principle of public co-funding of in-company training* (Unwin & Wellington, 1995; Ryan, 2001). MA apprentices now must hold a training contract, but nearly 90 per cent also have an employment contract, which means they earn a wage rather than receive an apprenticeship allowance (Ryan, 2001, p138). Training courses follow recommendations worked out by the Sector Skills Councils but their binding character appears weak. Moreover, apprenticeships under the MA scheme are much more heterogeneous with respect to gender, branches and occupations. In contrast to Germany, there is no law which would define qualifications of trainers, minimum contents of training courses or examination procedures. Modern Apprentices in the UK are expected to go for an NVQ during or at the end of their training time, but the 'success' or 'completion' rates are reported to be far from what the government had in mind when it launched the scheme some 10 years ago.

Although there is now generally a higher degree of formalisation (and certainly more bureaucracy) within the UK's qualification and certification frameworks than two or three decades ago, the didactical understanding which determines the processes of skill formation in the area of company-based initial training differs hugely from the German model. This seems especially true with regard to apprenticeships, as Paul Ryan points out that 'behind all the changes, British apprenticeship continues to differ fundamentally from its counterparts elsewhere in Europe'. He claims that the 'differences have even increased, as continental countries elaborate the public regulation of apprenticeship, while the UK favours deregulation' (Ryan, 2001, p133). The contrasting 'character' of the German system with its specific focus on the 'vocational principle' is adequately reflected in a statement which reads as follows (ibid., p136 f):

'A striking difference from Germany is the absence of minimum training periods, such as a three-year programme for bakers. Similarly, apprentices need not take part-time technical education, unless they are MA participants functioning under an NTO framework that requires it – and even then no general education is required. Indeed, 'off-the-job' training in a company training centre or with an external commercial provider is often enough to meet NTO requirements, despite concerns about its quality and relevance (Kodz et al., 2000).

The absence of process regulation reflects Britain's 'competence-based' approach to skill certification. What matters in principle for NVQ certification is demonstrated competence in the performance of work tasks, and that alone. Educational attainments should indeed form part of that assessment if they are needed for competence, but are otherwise to be discarded as superfluous (Jessup, 1991; Wolf, 1995). [...].

Nevertheless, the contrast to Germany is sharp. There is no equivalent of Germany's minimum training periods, mandatory part-time courses at the Berufsschule, and compulsory general education. More generally, while in continental Europe apprenticeship is integrated into the national education system, straddling the worlds of education and training, British apprenticeship is located firmly on the training side.'

In a similar way, Peter Raggatt some years ago pointed out the differences between the UK and the German system of vocational training with respect to the issue of external regulation of a training system in general and apprenticeships in particular. In his view the law which governs the Dual System – by setting up roles and responsibilities for the various 'participants' – provides 'continuity with the past', but at the same time works 'as a primary source of quality control' (Raggatt, 1988, p176).

Conclusion

Compared to other countries, there is no doubt that 'the continuance of tradition' in Germany has always been highly valued (Phillips, 1995, p61). This is especially true with respect to the Dual System of apprenticeship training since it owes much of its reputation to the fact that it has remained one of the most frequently (though not necessarily successfully) copied training systems in the world (Arnold, 1985; Kloss, 1995). Looking at its working principles and the obvious importance of institutions and organisational patterns laid out in law it may still be labelled 'the most comprehensive and detailed regulatory system for apprenticeship training in the Western world' (Raggatt, 1988, p175). There is still a strong belief that the apprenticeship system is faring much better than both the school system and the tertiary sector¹¹. In a recent press declaration the ministers of education of Austria, Switzerland and three German federal states¹² deplore the fact that international studies on education too often neglect the significance of vocational pathways for the 'ordinary school leaver'. In their plea to the OECD to 'accept and investigate the status of vocational education' they hold that the Dual System with its apprenticeship focus still offers well-accepted routes into skilled employment. This clearly underlines the social significance of the apprenticeship system in the national debate and the strength of the underlying principles which make it a 'cultural institution'.

Both the role of the state, the importance of 'shared practices' including chambers, employers and trade unions, the mandatory character of part-time course attendance and, above all, the 'vocational principle' make the German system an 'institution-based

11 The German education system in general, however, has recently become under fire by international studies on student performance (OECD 2000; 2003). Similarly, the national "Education Report" (Bildungsbericht) published in October 2003 (Avenarius et al. 2003) claims "serious" deficiencies in the country's school system by pointing to too many drop-outs, too few achievers of higher education entrance qualifications and too little support for students coming from poorer families.

12 See Gemeinsame Pressemitteilung der Schweizerischen Konferenz der kantonalen Erziehungsdirektoren, der Länder Österreich, Baden-Württemberg, Hessen und Bayern zur OECD-Studie "Bildung auf einen Blick" (Pressemitteilung des bayerischen Kultusministeriums, No. 288, 17 September 2003).

approach' (Young, 2003; Reuling, 2002). The contrast even to Modern Apprenticeships in the UK, in particular in England, is striking when it comes both to the social positioning of apprenticeships within the country's education system and also with respect to 'process regulation'. The UK apprenticeship system still sticks to market principles, although apprenticeships nowadays appear to be more formalised than 20 or 30 years ago. However, there can be no doubt that the overall social and economic importance given to the 'outcome-based approach' via competence-based training clearly distinguish it from the German system (Young, 2003, p234). In a recent paper, Lorna Unwin deplores the 'lack of demand for skills by UK employers' pointing out that there are too many of them who 'exist in the low-skill, low-product specification end of the economy and so have little need for skills above basic operative level' (Unwin, 2003, p9). This kind of 'vacuum' in the intermediate skills area eventually seems to be associated with at least two recent trends in the UK's vocational training system: The first one may be seen in the growing importance of full-time vocational education (Payne, 1999, p486 ff.) as against company-based training (which continues to marginalise the NVQ system) – while the second one is the 'dismal history' of youth training and competence-based qualifications, 'neither of which have advanced or even been particularly interested in meaningful vocational education' (Unwin, 2003, p8; Wolf, 2003).

It seems that this meritocratic 'move of vocational education and training into the college classroom' (Payne, 1999, p497) could in the long run jeopardise all political efforts to bring the UK closer to the status of an 'apprenticeship society'. However, another suspense-packed question, which also has to be addressed to the German system, certainly is the issue of the principal 'survivability' of apprenticeships in a modern 'learning society'.

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