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### The situation of continuing education in Germany – some comments

Germany has a very wide-ranging, differentiated system of continuing education, which can only be touched on in a marginal way here. There are a large number of institutions offering continuing education and these continuing education institutions have varying structures<sup>1</sup>:

- There are a *large number* of funding organisations, associations and institutions offering continuing education:  
Adult education colleges, religious institutions, trade union facilities, commercial establishments, companies, chambers, government continuing education facilities (e.g. to train teaching personnel), correspondence/remote learning institutes, colleges, universities and the foundations of the political parties)
- These providers have widely *different structures, funding arrangements and legal foundations*.
- There are *closed* (e.g. internal company continuing education programmes, foundations) and *open programmes*.
- One factor used to distinguish among these has traditionally been *general versus vocational continuing education* – but this dichotomy is no longer useful.

### The “professionalisation” debate in Germany

Germany has traditionally been marked by an intensive scientific discussion on professionalisation of adult education/continuing education. Most articles on professionalisation forward in *theoretical arguments and concepts*.

*Empirical research* on professionalisation has only taken place along more sporadic lines to date. It is usually on a small scale and more of a qualitative nature, focusing on a few selected aspects and frequently single cases.

In terms of its *content*, the professionalisation debate can be broken down into different topics:

#### 1. *Historical development of the profession*

Historical analyses on the development of the vocational field of continuing education

#### 2. *Discussion of terms and theoretical positions on professionalisation and specific aspects of adult-education activities and actions*

- Demarcation and analyses of definitions and terms (e.g. with respect to the definition of professionalisation<sup>2</sup> - professionalism<sup>3</sup> - acting professionally)
- Theoretical positions: analysis of professions with regard to their features, types of action, qualities and knowledge structures<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> For a detailed discussion of the system of continuing education in Germany see the book: Ekkehard Nuissl/ Klaus Pehl: Portrait Continuing Education Germany, 2004

<sup>2</sup> Professionalisation = process of turning an activity into a profession

<sup>3</sup> Professionalism = a special quality of professional action and activity

### 3. *Differentiation between adult education fields of activities and tasks*

There are a host of *descriptions and lists* on this which are ultimately pretty similar to one another. Most of these attempt to describe the breadth of the field of qualification requirements. Usually these tend to be at the plausibility level, based on experience and observation in the field of practice, but rarely have a solid empirical footing.

Distinctions are made, for example, between the following fields of action and tasks: leadership and management, exploration of needs, acquisition of contracts and programme planning, didactics, teaching, the production of teaching and learning material, support and coaching in learning, administration, organisation, media and technology.

### 4. *Understanding of one's own profession and professional biographies of people working in continuing education*

There are various descriptions, reports and studies on this which provide and reflect the subjective perspective of people working in the field of continuing education and their respective professional situation as they subjectively perceive it.

The more theoretical and historically oriented debate over professionalisation in Germany which has been carried on thus far offers a good basis and preliminary findings to hook up with systematic empirical research and to generate questions to guide research.

## **Competence profiles**

In Germany there is a very differentiated theoretical discussion taking place on the definition of "competence". The term "competence" in the context of vocational and continuing education research is seen to be distinct from the notion of "qualification", in contrast to the latter term emphasising more the subject and its disposition as reference points. It is no doubt useful to make precise theoretical distinctions between (*objective*) *qualification requirements* and (*subjective*) *competence (profiles)*.

There is not a large amount of data available in Germany either on qualification requirements or competence profiles, but there are some current empirical studies which at least begin to explore issues relating to qualification requirements, qualification and competencies of people working in the field of continuing education and which need to be analysed in greater depth, rendered more systematic and continued in the future both at the national and European level. Here are just a few examples:

*Professional biographical study on professional trajectories of people working in the field of continuing education (Berufsbiographische Studie zu den Berufsverläufen von Weiterbildner/innen), Nittel, D. et al. "Jongleure der Wissensgesellschaft," 2004)*

Description and analysis of very heterogeneous entries and paths in occupations.

*Fields of tasks and activities of people working in the field of continuing education (Aufgaben- und Tätigkeitsfelder von Weiterbildner/innen), study by Peters 2004, the study by Gruber, Harteis and Kraft 2004, Kraft 2006)*

This indicates that, similar to other occupational fields, activity in the field of continuing education is becoming more differentiated. If one examines the fields of tasks and activities, however, teaching and instruction continues to be one of the

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<sup>4</sup> A structured summary is provided in Roswitha Peters "Erwachsenenbildungs-Professionalität", p. 72 et seq. (Peters 2004, see also Nittel 2000).

main fields of activity on the part of continuing education teachers. Of increasing importance on top of this are the areas of management, public relations, consulting, organisation, planning and evaluation. Almost 80% of persons surveyed on this study are convinced that their current level of knowledge does not suffice to deal with tasks over the next 5 years. The need for continuing education is accordingly seen to be quite high. A need for continuing education is held to be especially salient in the following areas: work techniques and methods, teaching methods, didactics, data processing, business administration and managerial accounting.

*Weiterbildungsbedarfe von Weiterbilder/innen (The need for continuing education on the part of continuing education professionals), Gieseke and Reich 2004*

In a study on the continuing education needs of continuing education professionals, Gieseke and Reich identify a wide spectrum of topics, led by theories on self-guided learning, specific principles for teaching adults, learning behaviour and learning motivation, theories on vocational and continuing education trends, public relations/marketing, organisational development, moderation/presentation, advanced knowledge of methods, human resource development, self-evaluation and external evaluation in quality management.

*Competencies of continuing education professionals in company based training – a Delphi study (Kompetenzen von Weiterbildnern in der betrieblichen Bildung – eine Delphistudie), Harteis 2002*

This study used a predictive procedure (Delphi procedure) to survey qualification requirements expected in the future of people working in company continuing education.

*Study on social and vocational situation of people working in the field of continuing education (Federal Ministry of Education and Research 2004 and 2006)*

In a pilot study (2004) and a representative survey (2006) conducted people working in the field of continuing education are surveyed about their educational training, qualification, social and vocational job and employment situation, satisfaction with their work, etc.. Some of the results have been considered in the next chapter.

## **The situation of people working in the field of continuing education in Germany**

### *a) The situation with respect to continuing education for people working in the field of continuing education*

There are a large number of (continuing) education paths for people working in the field of continuing education.

- First degree university studies programmes
- Postgraduate studies programmes
- Continuing education offered by specific sponsoring institutions and associations
- A large number of free-standing offers of programmes to qualify trainers and teachers

### *b) continuing education standards*

There are no standardised, binding qualification and no formal minimum requirements applying to people working in the field of continuing education. Degrees are disparate – in addition to university degrees and masters degrees there are a large number of “certificates” having a market value which is difficult to evaluate. Often teachers come from other fields and do not have any specific training in continuing education per se.

*c) Vocational and employment situation of people working in the field of continuing education*

There are very heterogeneous groups working in the field of continuing education:

There is only a very low percentage of teaching personnel with fixed employment contracts (approximately 6%). A large share (more than 80%) work for a fee or limited contracts either as a second job or even as their main job. Full-time free-lance staff generally work independently, have a very insecure professional status and a precarious job situation.

The main aspects in a nutshell are:

Insecure professional status

- Lack of transparency of initial and continuing education paths
- No comparability of degrees
- No standards for the occupation of people working in continuing education
- Lack of descriptions of competence profiles

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