

Attracting university dropouts to VET

POLICY DEVELOPMENT

PRACTICAL MEASURE/INITIATIVE

 GERMANY

Timeline



ID number 28135

Background

The facilitation of access to VET is considered important as:

- (a) there are approximately 27% of university dropouts in bachelor programmes in recent years;
- (b) there are shortages of skilled workers;
- (c) small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) especially have difficulties in finding apprentices.

Objectives

The facilitation of access to VET for university dropouts aims to bring together university dropouts and companies providing training places, especially SMEs to set up a central online information platform and counselling services at the main higher education institutions.

Description

The Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) has been supporting countrywide pilots to ease access to VET for university dropouts to address predicted shortages of skilled workers. The funding volume of support has amounted to EUR 16 million for 2014-20. SMEs received support in hiring more young people from the target group.

The initiative focusses on:

- (a) bringing together university dropouts and companies that provide training places, especially SMEs. For example, a guide for SMEs, *Getting (university) dropouts on board as apprentices* (2018-19) was published. This is also the objective of regional integration projects funded and supported through the JOBSTARTER plus programme;
- (b) a central online information platform, launched in July 2016, provides information on

- alternative qualification paths inside and outside universities and on opportunities to transfer acquired competences;
- (c) setting up counselling services at the main higher education institutions in the Federal States;
- (d) collecting data and obtaining insights into the process of reorientating university dropouts to VET. The BMBF commissioned the German Centre for Higher Education and Science Research (DZHW) to conduct the research study *The attractiveness of vocational education and training for university dropouts* (2018) to obtain information on the transition routes to VET and on the factors for successful transition of university dropouts.

2015 Implementation

2016 Implementation

2017 Implementation

2018 Implementation

2019 Implementation

The guide for SMEs 'Getting university dropouts on board as apprentices' was published by BMBF in 2019.

2020 Implementation

The interim results (01/2020) of JOBSTARTER plus projects on supporting university dropouts revealed the following:

- (a) cooperation with colleges and universities makes it easier to identify and address the target group. Joint public relations work helps to make the counselling services more visible and to break the taboo on the subject of study doubt or dropout;
- (b) the problems and information needs of those seeking advice and those who doubt or dropout of their studies are complex. Therefore, they often need holistic advice. For the necessary consulting know-how, a coordinated understanding of consulting with the network partners is indispensable;
- (c) more than half of the companies advised by JOBSTARTER plus projects are micro and small enterprises. With the support of the projects, they were able to fill their vacant training places with graduates;
- (d) dropout students often opt for training in the industrial and commercial sector because of the affinity with the course of study they have taken to date. One out of three dropouts were convinced of the advantages of training in the skilled crafts sector.

2021 Implementation

From 2015 to January 2021, BMBF and ESF funded 17 projects (2015-18) in 15 Federal States and 14 follow-up projects (2018-20) in 11 Federal States.

The JOBSTARTER plus *Factsheet on projects for SME and university dropouts* was updated in March 2021, as well as the work aid *Improving guidance at universities for those who doubt their studies and drop out* (JOBSTARTER, 2020).

From 2021, the *Queraufstieg counselling network* will help young people who have doubts about their studies, or who have dropped out, to identify options for a professional or academic path with an alliance of network partners across the Federal States. The counselling network is funded by the BMBF as part of the Education Chain Agreement (*Bildungsketten*). The network is intended to act as a first point of contact for students who have doubts about their studies or are thinking of dropping out.

2022 Implementation

In 2022, on the homepage *Studienabbruch - und dann (Dropping out of studies - and then?)* current events are published that are aimed at students who have doubts about their studies and those who have dropped out. Three projects of the BMBF are aimed at students who are in doubt about their studies or have dropped out. Such as the *Queraufstieg* (transversal ascent) project. The *Queraufstieg counselling network* offers a variety of services and offers like the *Studienabbruch* (Dropping out of university) Podcast, testimonials and a series of events on dropping out of university. This once-a-year event took place in Saxony-Anhalt in 2022.

In 2022, Jobstarter published an updated reprint *Studienabbrecher als Auszubildende ins Boot holen. Ein Ratgeber für kleine und mittlere Unternehmen* (Getting dropouts on board as trainees. A guide for SMEs) and the Factsheet on JOBSTARTER plus projects for university dropouts.

Following the funding provided by the JOBSTARTER plus programme four former Jobstarter Plus projects have continued to address university dropouts or those who are considering it. These services for students in doubt, dropouts and SMEs are still available and can now be further developed.

2023 Implementation

The Queraufstieg counselling network continued its activities in 2023.

2024 Implementation

In January 2024, the project '*Beratungsnetzwerk Queraufstieg - Connected Advice on University Dropout in Berlin, Brandenburg, Bremen, Lower Saxony, and Saxony-Anhalt*' was launched. The goal of this cross-regional initiative is to establish more professional advisory and support structures for students who leave university without completing their studies. The project is set to run until the end of 2026.

2025 Implementation

In 2025, at regional level, chambers of commerce have launched initiatives such as SWITCH (Aachen Chamber of Commerce) and 'Relaunch your Career' (Bonn/Rhein-Sieg Chamber of Industry and Commerce), which offer support and advice to university dropouts on the transition to vocational training. The aim is to harness the potential of university dropouts for the economy and to create suitable career prospects. An overview of all relevant initiatives is available for the federal state of North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW).

Bodies responsible

- Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) (until 2025)
- Federal Ministry for Education, Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMBFSFJ) (since 2025)
- Chambers of industry and commerce (IHKs)

Target group

Learners

Young people (15-29 years old)

Young people not in employment, education or training (NEETs)

Entities providing VET

Companies

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)

Thematic categories

Modernising VET offer and delivery

Reinforcing work-based learning, including apprenticeships

Supporting lifelong learning culture and increasing participation

Promotion strategies and campaigns for VET and lifelong learning

Permeability between IVET and CVET and general and vocational pathways, academic and professional higher education

Financial and non-financial incentives to learners, providers and companies

Lifelong guidance

European priorities in VET

Osnabrück Declaration

Establishing a new lifelong learning culture - relevance of continuing VET and digitalisation

Subsystem

IVET

Further reading

[Initiative for the recruitment of university dropouts](#)

[Getting university dropouts on board as apprentices - A guide for SMEs \(2022\)](#)

[Map and a list of all guidance projects](#)

[Project „Beratungsnetzwerk Queraufstieg“ \(2024\)](#)

[Initiative SWITCH](#)

[Initiative "Relaunch your Career"](#)

[Overview on initiatives in NRW](#)

Related policy developments

2025 Implementation

Supporting SMEs to provide future-proof VET

Under the umbrella initiative, VET 4.0, the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) initiated a special funding line (Initial and continuing vocational training in the economy 4.0 – Support structures for SMEs in the adaptation process of in-company training) within the JOBSTARTER plus

 GERMANY

Type of development

Practical
measure/Initiative

Subsystem

IVET CVET

2025 Implementation**Alliance for initial and further training**

The 2015-18 Alliance for initial and further training was agreed between the Federal Government, Federal States, business and industry, the unions and the Federal Employment Agency at the end of 2014.

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Type of development

Strategy/Action
plan

Subsystem

IVET CVET

“ ... ” Cite as

Cedefop, & ReferNet. (2026). Attracting university dropouts to VET: Germany. In Cedefop, & ReferNet. (2026). *Timeline of VET policies in Europe* (2025 update) [Online tool].

<https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/timeline-vet-policies-europe/search/28135>