Dual apprenticeships are in great demand worldwide. Countries with high youth unemployment, in particular, are anxious to place more emphasis on the practical relevance of their vocational training systems, thereby creating a smoother transition to the labour market. In many cases, the German dual apprenticeship system serves as a role model. But what elements of this system can actually be transferred to other countries? How is it possible to convince businesses in countries with no tradition of vocational training that they should adopt the dual apprenticeship model?

Clemens Wieland

Naemi Härle

Young people in Germany have significantly fewer problems in the labour market than in many other countries worldwide. Besides Germany’s positive economic development, its dual apprenticeship system plays a major role. The content of apprenticeships and vocational training is closely linked and
harmonised with the requirements of industry. As a matter of course, apprentices do practical work in their future vocations as an integral part of their training, which enables a much smoother transition from training to the world of employment. This is not restricted to Germany, either; other countries with dual apprenticeship systems, such as Switzerland and Austria, also have low youth unemployment rates.

Many countries with high rates of youth unemployment are therefore planning a reform of their vocational training systems to bring them into line with the dual apprenticeship model. However, the chances of successfully transferring the traditional, tried and tested structures of dual vocational training in their entirety are slim. Attempts at reform are often thwarted by the unwillingness of industry to participate in training.

What we do

Given this background, the Bertelsmann Stiftung advocates a pragmatic approach in the discussion on “exporting” the dual apprenticeship model, to ensure fair and equal consideration of the interests of young people and industry alike. The fundamental idea is that, at all events, a transfer of at least some elements of the dual apprenticeship system, correspondingly adapted to the aims and framework conditions of the country in question, makes sense. This idea is the subject of the study “Germany’s dual vocational training system – a model for other countries?”. In this study, the dual vocational training system is broken down into 11 elements which can be individually transferred and adapted to the requirements of the importing country. The study has been published in three languages:

- Das duale System in Deutschland – Vorbild für einen Transfer ins Ausland? (DE)
- Germany’s dual vocational training system – a model for the countries? (EN)
- El sistema dual en Alemania ¿Es posible transferir el modelo al extranjero? (ES)

A major obstacle for the introduction of dual vocational training in countries that do not have this tradition is the participation of businesses, who often regard training mainly as a cost factor. We use cost-benefit simulations based on country and industry-specific data to demonstrate that dual vocational training can already be cost-effective for businesses during an apprentice’s training period, and indicate which framework conditions are required to ensure this. The findings of our research in this field are available here:
In addition to our studies, we also stage events and presentations on the subject of Germany’s dual vocational training system and the significant role of practice-oriented vocational training in reducing the rate of youth unemployment. We also participate in international networks dedicated to improving vocational training, such as the European Alliance for Apprenticeships. [https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1147&langId=en](https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1147&langId=en)