

4 Towards a better career guidance system

This chapter discusses the challenges that have been identified throughout the report. They focus particularly on ensuring equal and easy access to career guidance for low-qualified workers and their employers; on providing high quality career guidance nationwide; and on strengthening networking among the different stakeholders. This discussion leads to recommendations that propose ways forward and aspects to consider when introducing reforms to the current career guidance system at national level and in the different federal states.

Introduction

In line with the vision of a “CET Republic (*Weiterbildungsrepublik*)“ proclaimed by the previous German Government in the context of the NWS in 2021 and pursued by the new government, all actors involved in CET need to work together towards creating a culture of lifelong learning across the country. Many high quality offers for various target groups already exist, but take-up is low, especially among the low qualified. A lack of knowledge about CET options, the lack of awareness of its benefits and anxiety towards a return to the classroom are among the biggest barriers to training among adults.

Career guidance stands to play a crucial role in achieving this objective, as it can help address many of the dispositional and situational barriers that prevents adults from engaging in training as well as provide support in navigating the available training offers.

The report identifies low-qualified workers as a group that is ill served by existing programmes. While individuals in this group are in work, their labour market outcomes are often poor and the outlook ahead is bleak due to technological advances and other structural changes that threaten the sectors in which they are most often employed.

This section provides recommendations of how to make career guidance more relevant to them, by preventing skills obsolesce, fostering retraining, facilitating transitions to emerging sectors and occupations and recognising uncertified skills. Wherever possible, a developmental approach bears the most promising results by aiming at the persons’ involvement in processes that will support them. The recommendations focus on access to career guidance, quality of guidance and networking among the different stakeholders.

Streamline and connect existing career guidance offers

Streamline current provision under a ‘single brand’ at national level: Career guidance services vary significantly across federal states and sometimes across regions in the same state. There are currently no co-ordination mechanisms to enhance consistency, creating imbalances in access to and quality of provision. To address this challenge, the regional and local networks should be complemented by an overarching framework at the national level and the creation of a single career guidance brand. Such an initiative would streamline current provision and close any regional supply gaps. Operating under a single brand would increase the visibility of existing programmes, improve transparency for individuals looking for career guidance and ensure that individuals receive the most appropriate guidance for their specific needs. The success of this framework would strongly rely on the definition of common quality standards. These standards would allow creating a high quality brand with reliably good offers nationwide. The national brand could involve social partners and other local stakeholders, given their key role in the provision of career guidance.

At the national level, policy makers, associations of career guidance providers as well as the main employers’ and employees’ associations should come together to define a global vision for the brand and the related quality standards. Assessing and collating the needs of individuals and employers, matching them with the goals of policy makers would allow for a common understanding of what constitutes high-quality career guidance and would foster services in line with the projected needs of the labour markets (see recommendation on enabling providers).

The need for a national strategy on vocational and continuing education that respects local diversity has recently found support by the Education Alliance of SMEs (*Bundesverband mittelständische Wirtschaft, Unternehmerverband Deutschlands e.V.*) (BVMW, 2021^[1]). The shortage of skilled workers, the large share of early school leavers – particularly following the COVID-19 crisis – and difficulties finding apprentices have put SMEs in a difficult position when it comes to hiring skilled labour, leading to a call for a more consistent career guidance offer nationwide.

Ensure the sustainability of regional and sectoral networking initiatives: Networking initiatives play a crucial role in bringing together and co-ordinating provision at regional level. As networks, such as the ones initiated by the BMAS, evolve, guaranteeing continuity is a crucial challenge: the concern that successful pilots may be discontinued risks discouraging actors from investing further in the networks. Trust in the co-ordination and fair co-operation among all actors take time to develop but are key for the success of these initiatives. It is therefore important that the government starts considering how the networks can be sustained beyond the four-years funding period, signalling long-term engagement to all actors.

Support existing career guidance offers at federal state level to engage with low-qualified workers: Despite having access to most career guidance programmes, low-qualified workers use it less than their higher qualified peers do. Where low-qualified workers cannot be reached through their employers, the individual career guidance offers at federal state level should include a service that specialises on reaching out to this specific target group. Low-qualified workers often face a combination of barriers to CET that are particularly difficult to overcome and require skilled counsellors with a long-term commitment and well-connected services to deal holistically with multiple barriers. It is particularly important that referrals between actors and sometimes even between different services of the same actor work smoothly. Publicly provided career guidance is particularly important when neither the employer nor the individual have an intrinsic motivation to initiate training.

Box 4.1. Focus on low-qualified adults

Iceland

In Iceland, Lifelong Learning Centres provide education and career counselling with a specific focus on low skilled adults. A key strength of the centres are the skills of their staff: career guidance advisors typically have a diploma or a master's degree in education or vocational counselling. The objective is to strengthen the variety and quality of education and encourage general participation in lifelong learning and education. The reach of the centres is broad: there are dozens of Lifelong Learning Centres around the country including in sparsely populated areas, which conduct around 10 000 career guidance sessions with adults with low qualification levels per year. All adults over 20 are eligible, but preferential support is given to low-qualified workers in the tourism sector; low-qualified workers in SMEs; low-income workers; the unemployed with a particular focus on the long-term unemployed.

Source: OECD (2021^[2]), *Career Guidance for Adults in a Changing World of Work*, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9a94bfad-en>.

Strengthen outreach measures

According to the SCGA, only 36% of German low-qualified adults used career guidance on their own initiative. In order to engage this target group more in the use of career guidance, outreach measures have been piloted in some federal states, but always remain limited in scope. The right to CET guidance established in the Skills Development Opportunities Act (QCG) also requires outreach to potential beneficiaries. The outreach measures for low-qualified workers should be integrated in the general outreach and guidance activities and focus specifically on regions and sectors threatened by automation. The following approaches could be used to reach out to low-qualified workers:

- Reaching out to workers who are already taking part in CET or language courses and offer them career guidance directly, as it is done in some Adult Education Centres.

- Outreach through existing services for vulnerable adults and using social workers, teachers, hospital staff, library staff, etc., as mediators may prove preferable to implementing new ad-hoc outreach campaigns.
- Where they exist, community apps used by associations of neighbours could be used to advertise career guidance programmes.
- Broad public awareness campaigns seem to be more effective in attracting refugees, but less so for native adults.
- Outreach through social media has also proven effective in several countries, particular for younger workers (Box 4.2).

Box 4.2. Outreach via social media

Examples from different countries show how social media can be used in outreach strategies:

In **Belgium**, the PES (*Forem*) uses Facebook to communicate with young people and promote its services. Additionally, YouTube is used to share videos about PES services and Twitter is used to highlight new training opportunities.

In **Italy**, the Youth Guarantee Communications Plan 2014-15 used specific web- and mobile campaigns to share information to specific target groups.

In **Portugal**, some Qualifica Centers are using social networks, such as Facebook to advertise their services. Via videos and regular updates, they keep their followers engaged and present the centres as an open space that is accessible for everyone. This aims to engage adults who may have anxiety towards re-entering formal learning environments.

Source: CEDEFOP (2021^[3]), *How can you integrate LMI in your guidance activities?*, www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/resources-guidance/toolkit/how-can-you-integrate-lmi-in-your-guidance-activities; Centro Qualifica Azambuja (2021^[4]), www.facebook.com/centroqualifica.azambuja.3.

Improve the framework conditions of career guidance services for low-qualified workers

In order to increase the use and effectiveness of career guidance, it is crucial that services are designed to fit with the needs of the target group. Low-qualified adults are a heterogeneous group, including a large share of women, migrants, refugees and workers in helper jobs. This requires tailored career guidance services that can be adjusted to the individual's needs. While highly individualised measures can be disproportionately costly, the following measures address very specific barriers:

Introduce career guidance leave to support users who work: The expansion of the paid CET leave recommended in (OECD, 2021^[5]) should be complemented by the possibility to use the leave to participate in career guidance sessions. Particularly low-qualified workers are unlikely to consult guidance programmes on their own initiative in their free time. Their take-up of CET leave is low and a stronger promotion of free guidance during working hours could significantly increase take-up. Financial incentives should be paid to the employer to compensate for the reduction in production during the time of the career guidance session.

Box 4.3. Career guidance leave in other countries

Denmark

Learners may use training leave funded through the State Grant System for Adult Training (VEU-godtgørelse) to consult guidance services relating to their education and training. When completing an Individual Competence Assessment (IKV), low skilled and middle-skilled participants aged 18-65 are entitled to a fixed allowance funded by the state which also funds training leave. Only the funding arrangements are regulated by law; the social partners may regulate all other issues concerning training leave through collective agreements.

Netherlands

In the Netherlands, training is seen primarily as a responsibility of the social partners. Many large companies have social agreements (CAO) with career guidance facilities that allow workers to have time off work to consult guidance advisors. However, significant differences in the regulation of training leave exist between sectors.

Source: OECD (2021^[2]), *Career Guidance for Adults in a Changing World of Work*, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9a94bfad-en>.

Systematically implement the concept of one-stop-shops: Given the multiple barriers faced by the target group, career guidance programmes should systematically follow a one-stop-shop approach that helps adults identify their development needs and matching CET opportunities while also addressing any other barriers they might face (financing, health issues, care responsibilities, time-related issues etc.). These services should continue to support individuals while in training, through counselling, coaching and other support to limit dropouts.

For young adults up to 25 years the so-called Youth Employment Agencies (*Jugendberufsagenturen*), cross-jurisdictional alliances of different social service providers, serve as one-stop-shops for services needed to successfully master transitions from school to employment (BA, 2021^[6]). Similar approaches could be developed for adults so that guidance on CET is provided along with employment services, migration services, judicial assistance etc. Where a reorganisation of the career guidance structure is not realistic (yet), the frontend visible to the user should still appear as a one-stop-shop while behind the scenes the different stakeholders improve referrals among them. For instance, given the BA's limited resources, the job centres may not be in a position to offer physical one-stop-shop services to adults but could rely on collaboration with and referrals to other actors, such as the federal states' career guidance providers where available.

Grant flexibility in the use and combination of different delivery channels: While digital and online career guidance should continue to be used, it is indispensable to ensure the availability of face-to-face guidance opportunities. Since online solutions often require fewer resources, there may be the risk of a shift towards these offers, which may be difficult to access for many low-qualified and especially low-income adults. Increasing evidence shows that personal career guidance provision, through coaching and mentoring schemes, is one of the most effective strategies to engage low-qualified workers. Germany should thus expand and systematise work-based career guidance and mentoring schemes (OECD, 2021^[5]). In addition to initiatives by the social partners such as the CET mentors (*Weiterbildungsmentoren*) and coaching organised via the Participation Opportunities Act (*Teilhabechancengesetz*), funding should be made available nationwide to enable providers to develop effective initiatives in co-operation with local partners who have access to the target group.

Integrate career guidance with the validation of skills and partial qualifications: As described in (OECD, 2021^[5]), policy developments on career guidance, validation of skills and CET not always occur in

a joined-up manner. This can hinder a smooth transition from one step to the next for the individual and disrupt upskilling and reskilling processes. Establishing a working group, as proposed in the report, composed by key stakeholders of the three policy areas could explore linkages and issue recommendations to the German Government on further actions to be taken.

Pursue the further development of the BA towards a public employment and CET service (*Agentur für Arbeit und Weiterbildung*)

Following the idea of a CET republic, the BA has a great potential to become a public employment *and* CET service. The current expansion of the BA's LBBiE shows the commitment by policy makers to support this strategy and open access to CET guidance even more. Guidance on employment and CET for workers can help prevent unemployment before it arises. The following recommendations apply to broadening the role of the BA:

Increase the capacities of Job Centres to provide career guidance: Currently, the approach to guidance is still very different in Employment Agencies (*Arbeitsagenturen*) compared to Job Centres¹ in most locations. The capacity of case workers to provide individualised advice is very limited in Job Centres, often due to the high caseload. At the same time their clients' needs are often high and their situations very complex. Where individualised career guidance cannot be provided by the caseworkers, additional support through specialised counsellors and coaches is very important. It is essential that the new or retrained counsellors under the LBBiE scheme be given the capacity – especially in terms of time – to provide the same in-depth skills analysis and develop an individualised career pathway for the individuals they are in charge of in Job Centres, leveraging the counselling tools already used in Employment Agencies. Since there will not be enough LBBiE counsellors available nationwide to cover all locations, specialised coaches can complement the counsellors' work and encourage the individuals to stay engaged.

Collect and analyse data on career guidance sessions and users: Data collection should be intensified by all guidance providers and especially by the BA. While most co-ordinated career guidance offers in the federal states (see above) collect and publish data on users and guidance sessions, no data is collected by the biggest nationwide provider of career guidance, the BA. This undermines improvements in targeting, quality as well as transparency and accountability. Matching these data with the ones collected by the federal states' offers can enable the BA to play an important role in filling regional supply gaps. In addition to the collection of data on the career guidance sessions themselves, an effort should be made to follow user outcomes. Much can be learnt to improve the provision of career guidance and ensure evidence-based policy making.

Provide support to SMEs on providing career guidance and training for low-qualified employees

Well-designed support policies can assist companies in assessing the skills of their employees, planning training provision and ultimately increase productivity while also benefitting employees. Public actors can help companies assess, develop and use their employees' skills. An extensive discussion about the rationale for policy intervention in this area can be found in OECD (2021^[7]). To foster in-company provision of career guidance, Germany should consider the following advice:

Target existing programmes for companies to support low-qualified workers: Low-qualified adults are among the groups that are hardest to reach via general career guidance programmes. Existing support programmes for companies should aim to include specific training for and sensitisation of managerial staff on the importance of career guidance for their lower qualified staff. Specific programmes already exist to

support companies that lack the capacity to plan training and to provide guidance to their employees. The *unternehmensWert: Mensch* programme, for example, offers targeted and subsidised consultancy services for SMEs to develop modern, people-centred human resource strategies.

Guidance services for companies should go beyond the initial analysis and recommendations: Enterprises and especially SMEs need support throughout the implementation process. Support with the actual set up of career guidance to employees and later training programmes is crucial to increase take-up.

Strengthen the quality of career guidance services

Career guidance and CET providers have been largely left out of the NWS development process, although their role in the provision of training is crucial. Provider associations should be involved in policy making processes. Working directly with the individuals, it is essential to hear their voice and include their needs in the setup of new programmes. The following steps would be appropriate ways forward to further improve quality:

Implement a nationwide quality standard framework: As described above, this should be an essential component of a common CET guidance brand. Such a framework should cover both the continuous development of a provider's internal processes to further improve the quality of the provision as well as a competency profile for career guidance counsellors, describing the specific expertise that the professionals would ideally have.

Set clear qualification requirements for career guidance counsellors in calls for tender: Currently, many counsellors have no specialised background in career guidance, counselling or adult learning which can undermine the quality of the services they offer. The design of public calls for tenders to choose career guidance providers should include criteria related to the qualifications of career guidance counsellors and their knowledge and expertise in working with (low-qualified) adults, as it is the case e.g. in Berlin's concept paper. This is particularly important when counsellors will be dealing with low-qualified facing multiple barriers. In some countries, it is common for counsellors to be specialised psychologists (see Box 4.4). Besides mandated requirements in calls for tender, better working conditions, notably salaries, can help attract more qualified career counsellors. For example, the latest developments in NRW are a step in the right direction (increasing the hourly allowance, revised quality criteria etc.). Continuity from a user perspective should also be considered when choosing providers, since career guidance for low-qualified adults often depends on long processes of building up trust.

Provide incentives for regular training of career guidance providers: Counsellors working with low-qualified adults are often in a difficult situation aiming to provide career guidance to individuals who are more often than not unaware of guidance and CET options and/ or their benefits, working for employers whose interest in reskilling or upskilling their blue colour workforce is often limited. To be successful, counsellors need to be knowledgeable on all available career guidance and CET programmes and financial incentives as well as on appropriate skills assessments for each individual, but they also to be able to motivate and inspire, clear doubts and open doors. Keeping all these skills up to date requires investment. Some federal states like NRW offer several days of training to new staff, but training should be offered systematically, for example at the co-ordination offices of regional networks or organised by the BA. In the context of the COVID-19 crisis, special focus should be placed on digital skills training. For new hires, the baseline qualification should also be raised and/or specialised on career guidance and working with adults as it is the case in some federal states (Chapters 2 and 3) and other countries (Box 4.4).

Expand the use of AI solutions during the career guidance process: While it is crucial that some components of career guidance are conducted in person by skilled career guidance advisors, others parts of the process could be automated leveraging advances in AI. For instance, initial meetings meant to raise motivation to train are better carried out by a skilled counsellor. Technology can support them when

drawing up the user's skills profile while the search of and matching to training and job opportunities could be more easily automated (Verhagen, 2021^[8]). As the drop in low-qualified users in Berlin during the COVID-19 crisis confirmed, digital solutions may not always be the best solution for this target group, but e.g. guided use (or co-browsing) can help users become accustomed with the use and strengthen their digital skills.

Box 4.4. Quality standards

BeQu (Beratungsqualität) concept

In Germany the National Guidance Forum of Education and Employment (*Nationales Forum Beratung in Bildung, Beruf und Beschäftigung*, nfb) developed the Guidance Quality Concept. BMBF funded the development of this detailed concept between 2011 and 2014. It includes a quality development framework and a competence profile for career guidance advisors. The concept considers the following dimensions of quality: i) overarching principles, e.g. client orientation, transparency, ethical framework, processes for quality improvement; ii) professionalism and counselling competences; iii) standards relating to the career guidance process; iv) organisational standards; and v) societal objectives and goals. The implementation of a nationwide quality standard framework could be largely based on these standards.

Canada: Competency framework

An example where standards already apply nationwide are the Canadian Standards and Guidelines for Career Development Practitioners (S&G) that outline the competencies needed by the practitioners to provide effective and people-centred guidance across the lifespan. The development of the guidelines was funded by Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) along with contributions from career development partners. The objectives in developing these national standards were: to define career development as a legitimate specialisation; to provide a foundation for designing training; to provide quality assurance to the public; to recognise and validate the diverse skill sets of practitioners working in the field; and to create a common voice and vocabulary for career development. The competencies are organised in three areas: core competencies, specialisation competencies and ethical principles.

The concrete implementation can vary by region. To obtain a permit to work as a career counsellor in Quebec (Canada) for example, both a bachelor's and a masters' degree in career counselling must be completed, which include modules on the production and dissemination of labour market information, online sources of labour market information, and how to incorporate labour market information in career counselling.

The Alpha label (*Alphasiegel*)

In Berlin (and Baden-Wuerttemberg) a specific quality label exists for providers who offer their services in an easily accessible way for adults with low literacy. To receive the quality label, at least 20% of the provider's employees need to take part in a half day sensitisation workshop, all communication channels need to be adapted to readers with low literacy (e.g. websites, flyers) and also in the physical spaces of the provider orientation signs need to be accessible to the target group. The development of the label, as well as support for providers during these adaptations are implemented by the Berlin's Senate Department for Education, Youth and Family and the Basic Education Centre (*Grund-Bildungs-Zentrum*) Berlin.

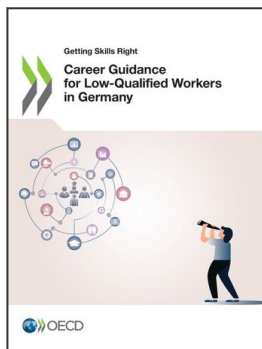
Source: OECD (2021^[2]), *Career Guidance for Adults in a Changing World of Work*, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9a94bfad-en>; OECD (2021^[5]), *Continuing Education and Training in Germany*, <https://doi.org/10.1787/1f552468-en>; Grund-Bildungs-Zentrum Berlin (2021^[9]), *Bildung für alle. Kompetenz für Berlin.*, <https://grundbildung-berlin.de>.

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Notes

¹ In Germany, the Employment Agencies (*Agenturen für Arbeit*) provide a wide range of services connected to the labour market and education, such as the payment of compensation benefits, in particular unemployment benefit (*Arbeitslosengeld I, insurance-paid*); placement in jobs and training positions; career counselling, employer counselling; promotion of CET; promotion of the vocational integration of people with disabilities. Besides there are also the job centres, responsible for securing subsistence through unemployment benefit (*Arbeitslosengeld II, tax-paid*), payment of contributions to health and long-term care insurance, accommodation and heating, education and participation benefits, labour market-related integration.



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