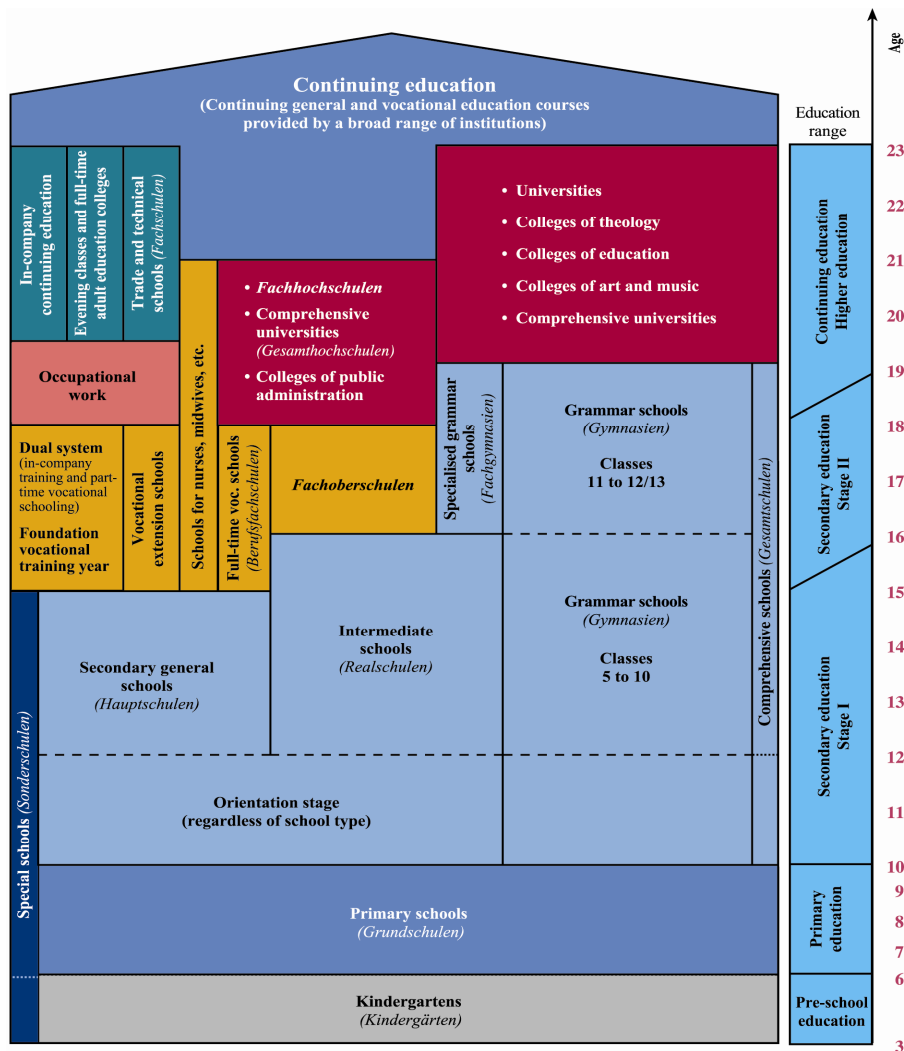


# 1 The Education System in Germany

The following figure gives a good overview about the German school system and vocational education in Germany.



- Diagrammatic representation of the typical structure of the education system in the Federal Republic of Germany. In individual *Länder* there are variations from the above pattern.
- The age given for attendance at the various educational institutions refers to the earliest possible typical entry.

Figure 1: Education in Germany – basic structure (HIPPACH-SCHNEIDER et al 2007)

Educational policy in Germany follows a federal principle. That means that every federal state (Länder) in Germany is in the responsibility to organize and realize the legal and nationwide regulations on his own. The government plays just a subordinated role. The general structure is given by “The Conference of German cultural ministers” (KMK) and can be classified as a kind of obligatory guideline. Therefore the information below are valid for the Federal State North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW).

In general school begins at the age of six years in Germany and is compulsory. The compulsory education is forced by law<sup>1</sup> and subdivided in

- a) *full-time compulsory education* for a period of ten years. After four years primary school students follow into comprehensive schools (secondary school stage I) which are divided into secondary general schools, intermediate schools and grammar schools. Within this range students can fulfil their compulsory fulltime education.
- b) a *continued compulsory schooling* in secondary school (stage II) respectively vocational schools.

After the secondary education stage I there are different possibilities. Pupils can chose to continue grammar schools or specialised grammar schools. Beneath that there is the possibility to visit

- vocational extension schools,
- schools for nurses, midwives,
- full-time vocational schools,
- Fachoberschulen,
- the dual system and
- the foundation vocational training year.

Students in an apprenticeship have to visit schools as long as the apprenticeship is valid and agreed before the apprentice fulfil his/her 21 birthday.

For a more detailed description of the school system in Germany – especially for the vocational school system – see HIPPAACH-SCHNEIDER et al (2007).

Since 2012 there is a new approach for the transition from school into the world of work in Germany. Since 2012 career orientation is fixed for all pupils and starts at the age of 14 years. Career

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<sup>1</sup> c.f. MINISTERIUM FÜR SCHULE UND WEITERBILDUNG (MSW) 2012

orientation becomes part of all school subjects and is in line with the individualized approaches. The process will be documented with a portfolio and a target agreement (c.f. MSW 2014).

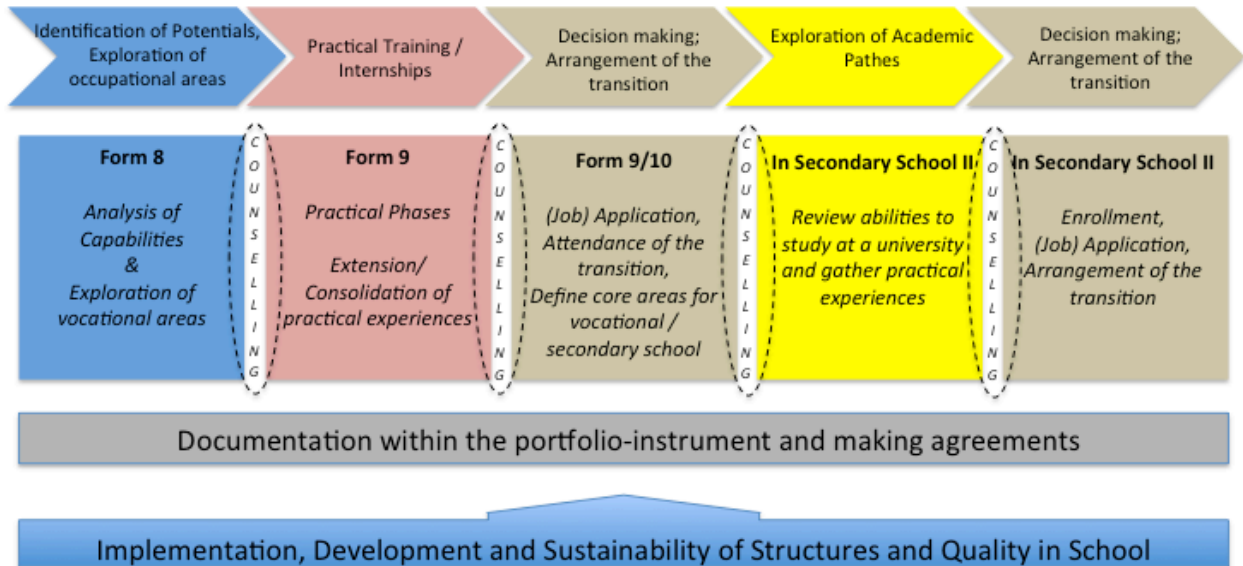


Figure 2: Process of Career and Academic Orientation in the German Education System – Core Elements and Structure (c.f. MSW 2014)

The above mentioned core elements are obligatory for all schools. They are fundamental for the design of the (school-specific) process of career and academic orientation. For each core element there is information about the target group, aims and objectives, expected abilities as well as minimum standards. The given standards are presented on a middle level of abstraction and each school has to work out the details and the realization on their own. It is possible to combine existing elements or to add further elements as long as the minimum standards are assured. The use of a portfolio instrument is obligatory within the process of career and academic orientation. The intention of an early career orientation process is that students will be able to make a more conscious decision in respect of their own career path and avoid inadequate career decisions.

Within this approach there are the following similar steps of career orientation: At first there is an element identifying the individual potentials and career possibilities. The second one is to explore –

for example in an apprenticeship –specific jobs. The third step is decision making where the design of the individual career path is taken in the centre stage.

Because career orientation is becoming more and more important and the above mentioned approach is in a kind of testing phase, the schools and the government in North-Rhine-Westphalia are still in a development process. Since 2012 schools evaluate good practice examples on the basis of the steps of career orientation.

Because Career Orientation is a very big and important debate in the Education System in Germany and producing momentous occasions to think of own interests, values and skills the next chapter deals with this topic in more detail.

## **2 The actual situation and the requirements of low level vocational education in Germany**

The issue of vocational orientation has become more and more important in Germany in the last years. This can be stated because once everywhere deficits in the current state of the career choice of young people are identified and discussed. For example the dropouts in the field of the hotel and restaurant industry is very high: More than 50% breaking of their apprenticeships before maturity. One explanation is that students don't know the challenges and required skills within a specific work area and that a more conscious and individualized career orientation and decision making will narrow the dropouts down.

But it is very challenging for young people who have to face the transition from school into apprenticeship and / or the world of work. Is not easy to make the right individual choice because there is a broad range of influences and information concerning questions related to (career) decisions and the individual career path. Therefore it is important to know early on both (a) information about the world of work and the opportunities after school and (b) their own desires, strengths and weaknesses.

On this account is not sufficient to understand career orientation as a (technical) process in which a preparation is made on the future career choices. In fact students have to discover information, requirements, challenges and particularly their own interests in an active and self-controlled way so they will be able to reorganize the process if necessary or the occupational interests will change. It is not sufficient if a tutor etc. provides information and act as a decision-maker. Such a classical view of

vocational / career orientation consider the student as a passive learner and hustle him/her as a recipient.

According to the 'Bundesagentur für Arbeit' (Federal Employment Agency) – which is jointly responsible together with the schools to support students in their career choice – the tasks of career orientation measures have to include different aspects:

- to give young people the chance to review their abilities and skills concerning their possible career choices and to evaluate the self-orientation in the multitude of professions and to make a career choice,
- to show young people the necessary skills for taking up vocational training and
- to integrate young people in a sustainable way into the education market.<sup>2</sup>

In a modern way vocational orientation encompasses tasks that arise in the context of the preparation and execution of transitions in work or training. They focus on professional orientation by exploring individual conditions and prerequisites as well as vocational requirements on the labor market. In addition, the integration of these two perspectives in the form of a matching process is relevant. In consequence, there is an implementation task in which the learner has to make a well-founded decision and initiate implementation steps (targeted job search, writing application forms, etc.). Specific training or work placement opportunities are not in the foreground. But rather individual support needs a holistic approach. It leads to individual sustainable skill development and development of competencies. This aims to give the learner the opportunity for a self-directed professional orientation and reorientation which can reproduced in the future.<sup>3</sup>

According to the Federal Employment Agency there are three phases of the career orientation:

(a) orientation phase

(b) decision-making phase

(c) implementation phase.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> c.f. BUNDESAGENTUR FÜR ARBEIT 2010.

<sup>3</sup> c.f. KREMER 2010, S. 5., c.f. BEUTNER / FREHE / KREMER / ZOYKE 2009

<sup>4</sup> c.f. Ausbildungspakt Berufsorientierung 2006, p. 10.

This regulatory framework leads to a five-step-approach in the German Vocational and Career Orientation conception with the stages:

- Individual self-discovery
- Exploration of vocational areas
- Individual opportunities and possibilities
- Realization and applying for a job
- Possibilities in the world of work

These underlying core elements of orientation in the system of vocational education in Germany could be concretise in the following way:

*Individual Learning* means that the learner is in the centre and simultaneously the initial point of the whole process. Following this assumption it is crucial to consider the learning speed, the interests and strength of the learner. The underlying learning theory is a constructivist one.<sup>5</sup>

*Collaborative Learning Environment* stated out that students have to work together to solve a given authentic, open and complex problem. Because of this complexity it is hardly possible to split the tasks and a solution can only actualize by the whole team.

*Situated development* of competence means that the pupils learn in, through and on realistic and authentic exercises. Those exercises have to be open and complex, too.

*Strength orientation* accentuate that the personal strength, interests and competences stay in focus. This is the initial point for the career orientation and a good opportunity to boost the self-awareness and self-esteem of the learners . Strength could be on the hand talents, knowledge, skills, interests, creativity, dreams, aspiration, goals, passions, relationships and so on.<sup>6</sup>

These core elements serve as didactical principals and can consult for the development of exercises for career orientation as well as for the discussion of values.

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<sup>5</sup> c.f. BEUTNER / KREMER 2013, p. 32.

<sup>6</sup> c.f. BEUTNER / GOCKEL 2010, p. 72.

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