



# Developing Innovative and Attractive CVET programmes in industrial shoe production

## Country Report on Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) - Germany

IO 2

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# 1 German report on recognition of prior learning (RPL)

## a. Introduction

Nobody would deny that it's a waste of time and de-motivating if people who acquired already some knowledge, skills and competences (KSC) during their educational or working life have to re-acquire those when changing the educational track. However, how to measure/assure the equivalence of these prior KSC and the requirements of the new track? Dozens or even hundreds of mechanisms have been developed in the recent years by different stakeholders, this national report sketches briefly the most relevant respective successful ones in Germany.

It does not aim at delivering a comprehensive overview of any mechanism possible; mechanisms and examples described follow a pragmatic approach; leading questions were:

- Has the mechanism real benefit for both the learner and the educational provider or does it turn out as a technocratic nightmare (like some word-by-word comparisons of curricula of different educational tracks)?
- How is the quality assured; that the prior learning outcomes (LO) are really comparable to the new requirements?
- Who is responsible for the process of RPL? Are there any potential conflicts between the provider of the new track and the institution being in charge for RPL?
- Which of the mechanisms detected fit best for the sake of the aims of DIA-CVET project (to develop, pilot and evaluate CVET-profiles in industrial shoe production)?
- And, finally, which of these mechanisms are, according to national laws and regulations, legally applicable for CVET on European Qualification Framework level 5 or 6?

In the last chapter of the comparative report the mechanisms, which DIA-CVET will apply when choosing the beneficiaries for piloting (IO6) are drafted.

## b. Rationale for each country (Germany)

Formal qualifications play traditionally a very important role on the German labour market. When applying for a job, the most important question is: "What qualification do you hold?", not "What skills do you have?". Two examples might illustrate this, partly bizarre, relation:

1. If somebody wants to work as a researcher at a university, he must hold a university master degree, independent of the faculty. In our institute, Institute Technology and Education (ITB) Uni Bremen, we are allowed to hire an academic who studied philosophy (EQF7) as a VET-researcher, but not a foreman or trainer (EQF 6) with vast experience in our subjects.
2. Entrepreneurship in certain sectors (handicraft, e. g. roofers): If someone wants to open his own business, he must hold the degree of a handicraft foreman (Handwerksmeister). Even if he provides evidence that he ran his business very successfully in another country – no option to start in Germany (EQF 6).

When talking about Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), two different ways of acquiring qualifications regularly must be distinguished: Whether attending the lessons/courses and passing the assessments is mandatory or whether passing the exams is sufficient. Examples for the first case are general schooling and Initial Vocational Education and Training (IVET, EQF 3 or 4), for the

latter Continuous Vocational Education and Training (CVET, EQF 6) and, with some exceptions, Higher Education (HE, EQF 6 or 7).

From a quantitative perspective, RPL in Germany is most important in IVET: Unskilled or semi-skilled workers with vast working experience or people qualified in other countries without bilateral agreements of accepting qualifications might prove evidence that they learnt what an average apprentice in Germany has learnt. In order to do so, there are different options: First, the worker can get information on the website "Recognition in Germany" (<https://www.anererkennung-in-deutschland.de/en>). There he can find out whether it is possible to get enrolled in an equivalence assessment in order to get an equivalence certificate for Germany of his professional qualification. It takes about 1-3 month and costs approximately 100-600 Euros. If there is not enough proof that the foreign qualification is equivalent to the German, it is also possible (if certain formal requirements are met) to undertake the final examinations of a regular apprenticeship (examination of externals/Externenprüfung). If the evaluation of the work evidence has the result, that some spheres of activity of the corresponding vocation are missing, certain constraints might be negotiated; for example, to visit seminars or to undergo practical training to close the skills gap in these spheres before being accepted as an external candidate for exams.

## 2 The German CVET-structure

Beside some quantitatively (in terms of amount of beneficiaries) irrelevant qualifications on EQF level 5, Germany provides two important CVET qualifications (for all sectors):

Industrial foreman (EQF 6):

All German foreman profiles consist of 3 (industry, then part 3 and 4 are joined) or 4 (handicraft) parts:

1. Vocation-overlapping skills (entrepreneurship, bookkeeping, etc).
2. VET trainer ordinance.
3. Vocation-specific, practical.
4. Vocation-specific, theoretical.

Holders of a corresponding IVET qualification with some years of work experience are allowed to register for the 3 respective 4 examinations on the parts, but without preparation via seminars they would probably fail. Offering these preparation seminars is a business model for German chambers of commerce and industry respective handicraft, participants have to pay quite a lot. Often parts of the (or even the whole) amount are paid by the company, for which the candidate is working.

State-certified Technician (EQF 6, as well):

Beside the foremen, who are the focus of the DIA-CVET project, another established CVET-qualification exists: State-certified technicians. Compared to the foremen qualification, technicians usually acquire more academic knowledge (science, materials, etc.) and less work practice-relevant skills. Technicians are sometimes named as “the little brother of an engineer”. This report neglects the technician qualification as DIA-CVET focusses on operational Spheres of Activity (SoA).

### 3 Which are the main mechanisms of RPL in Germany?

A) General/structural RPL: Each holder of a certain qualification receives an exemption. A non-bureaucratic approach, applied on different levels:

IVET: Each apprentice with good grades and/or the university entrance diploma (Abitur) might shorten the length of their apprenticeship programme by ½ year.

1. IVET: The certificate of a 2-year/EQF level 3 qualification (in our sector the leather processing worker/Fachkraft Lederverarbeitung) is fully accredited against the corresponding 3-year/EQF level 4 qualifications (in our sector the industrial shoemaker/industrieller Schuhfertiger). If a leather processing worker wants to proceed to level 4, they have to participate only in the third (last) year of this apprenticeship programme.
2. CVET (EQF 6): A holder of any foreman qualification (EQF6) is exempted from examinations on the (by far smallest) part 2 (VET trainer ordinance) when acquiring the foreman qualification in another sector.
3. HE (EQF 6/7): Students who change their programmes (f. e. from engineering to technical VET-teacher) are exempted from lessons already learned in the previous programme. Students qualified in technical IVET/CVET programmes are exempted from few lectures, f. e. technical drawing.

All the drafted examples rely on identical curricula/exams or established good practice; thus no additional quality assurance (QA) measures are applied.

B) Individual RPL applies mainly when talking about exemptions from visiting courses or seminars or undertaking an apprenticeship, thus it plays only a minor role in CVET. Interesting examples are:

1. As drafted above, RPL in IVET (EQF3/4): Workers with experience or qualified in other countries without bilateral acceptance of qualification might apply at their local chamber for RPL via a portfolio. As Germany has 79 chambers (responsible for their region), measures applied are manifold and often do not follow QA principles; the local labour market and political beliefs nebulise objective measures. In regions of Germany, where the lack of skilled workers is already obvious, chambers developed generous concepts: They accept a lot of evidence and offer tailor-made support to pass the exams. On the other side, in poorer regions unskilled workers, especially from abroad (refugees) are seen as competitors: Regional chamber bureaucrats and other stakeholders are brilliant in throwing obstacles in the processes of RPL.
2. CVET (EQF 6): A holder of any foreman qualification (EQF6) might be exempted from examinations on part 1 (Vocation-overlapping skills) when acquiring the foreman qualification in another sector. Comparable to the approach applied by chambers drafted under b.1, the acceptance and the procedure depend strongly on the sector and the region.
3. "Upon application, the competent body may exempt the candidate from the examination in the examination section "Vocation-overlapping skills" [...], if in the five years preceding the application, an examination has been successfully passed before a competent body, a public or state-recognized educational institution, or before a



state examination board, which meets the requirements of the relevant examination content under this Ordinance. In the area of the foremen's examination there is (mostly) no automatic recognition, but there is an exemption after an individual case examination by the committee. The decision then naturally also applies to comparable cases. Since the examinations are often structured differently, however, one field of activity is usually not completely covered. The most likely exemptions are in the areas of order processing or operations management." (own translation of the answer of the chamber in charge for industrial shoe sector)

4. Thus a complete exemption from examination is hardly possible – independent of former qualifications. Here it is important to highlight again, that CVET is a business model for chambers and educational providers: People, qualified via corresponding IVET and with a certain work experience (6 months or 1 year) are allowed to apply for the examinations without visiting any course. But examinations are linked this close to the courses that most candidates would fail. The reason is very simple: People, participating only in the examination, have to pay a fee of 550€ (2019) – if they visit the courses, as well, they have to pay additionally 7380€ (2019).
5. HE (EQF6/7): Students who studied already at another faculty, in another country or have experience as skilled workers might apply for individual RPL. Again, no general or reliable QA measures exist; it depends strongly on the person being in charge of RPL. A rather curious side-effect of Bologna reforms, aiming (beside other) at increasing transnational mobility, can be reported: Before Bologna, students who spent a semester abroad, were depending on the good-will of their professors when talking about recognition of their learning outcomes (LO) from abroad. Nowadays, with all the detailed module descriptions, that differ at least slightly from university to university, begrudging professors have evidence for non-acceptance...

### C) SWOT Germany

#### Strengths

- Structural RPL well established.
- Many options of individual RPL.

#### Weaknesses

- Overwhelming relevance of formal qualifications.
- Individual RPL without QA standards and depending on good-willingness of competent institution.

#### Opportunities

- Options for mutual learning from other countries.
- Lack of skilled workers might accelerate German inert system

#### Threats

- Established and recognized CVET-qualifications might be challenged by “plug and play” certificates.

## 4 Summary

As the aim of DIA-CVET in Germany is not to invent a new system, but to revive the industrial shoemaker foreman, we recommend to apply within DIA-CVET mechanisms comparable to those drafted above. The DIA-CVET approach is more modular (5 or 6 modules to be tested in the participating countries); thus participants who have already learnt the content of a sector-independent Sphere of Activity (e. g. environmental management) elsewhere should receive structural recognition for this sphere.