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### **Dual Education: Europe's Secret Recipe**

When we address the issue of whether the dual system is Europe's 'secret recipe', two questions present themselves: why is it successful?; and is it transferable?

Establishing why the dual system has been such a key factor underpinning economic success in Germany is evidently not without difficulty or controversy. Yet a number of features stand out as worthy of consideration in the wider European context.

First, we should consider the dual system in its context. Dual training is deeply embedded in the wider process of skills development; as in all other education and training systems there is a relationship to the nature of the labour market and employment, though this is complex and not fully understood. The concept of 'Beruf' is unique in Europe; the notion of 'kompetenz' is distinct from 'competence' in the UK and 'compétence' in France.

Secondly, the dual system qualifies people for occupations before they leave school for entry into a labour market that is highly stratified and regulated compared to many countries. Compared to other countries like the UK, this arguably reduces the need for companies to train workers whilst in work, and also raises issues about the propensity of individuals and firms to

engage in lifelong learning. Further, dual training is arguably backed up by employment law which helps to protect people in work, offering the prospect of a stable return for initial investment in training.

Thirdly, dual training relies on a very high level of employment involvement and a well-developed infrastructure of Chambers of Commerce; this underpins the control of examinations by trades themselves.

Given these features, what is the potential for transferability to other contexts? At first sight the prospects do not look good. Of course, we cannot seek to replicate the entire German system, along with its accompanying labour market regime. Rather, the key issue is whether we can extract the essential features without losing the essence of success. There are structural as well as contingent issues to consider.

Structurally, the dual system is about an extremely close fit between qualifications and occupations. Most European countries are trying to increase the fit already. The dual system also means enhancing the role of employers. Improving methods of social dialogue is a prevalent concern in Europe; but for many countries, achieving strong employer commitment is still some way off. Where countries have been developing apprenticeships, other issues have arisen. In Norway, for example, the OECD has identified a number of areas of concern: weak basic skills of entrants; non-completion; quality assurance; student choice; the skills of enterprise-based trainers and counsellors. Such issues are 'teething troubles' which may well arise in other systems.

At the same time, it is important to remember that countries without the dual system often have higher levels of lifelong learning, more permeability in their systems, and greater flexibility. Adding some elements of dual training into such contexts may ultimately produce the ideal mix.