

VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING: INTERVIEW WITH JORRIT HOLST



One of the foci of the Monitoring on ESD is the anchoring of vocational education for sustainable development in Germany. What characterizes ESD in Vocational Education and Training (VET)?

The goal of vocational ESD is to empower trainees with the abilities to think and act sustainably and responsibly. Through the dual approach of workplace practice and training within the vocational school, vocational ESD directly links sustainability with practical action. Yet there is a certain interplay here: between acting within the safe ecological boundaries of the earth system, the promotion of social justice and reaching economic goals, there are always trade-offs and contradictions. It is up to ESD in VET to view these trade-offs and contradictions as real-world opportunities for learning.

ESD in VET is increasingly seen as an important factor in the transformation of the economy. Where does ESD in VET come from and what are its current challenges?

In vocational education, ESD is often conceptualized in the strong tradition of vocational environmental protection, which has already been anchored in German training programmes since the 1990s. Yet when we take a comprehensive look at the transformation toward sustainability, ESD in VET clearly goes beyond environmental protection. As such, it aims to empower trainees to co-design sustainable economies that are partly still in the process of development. One current challenge, for example, is the linking of sustainability and digitization. Both individually already imply considerable changes for VET. However, contemporary vocational training needs to understand digitization in the context of sustainability; they cannot function independently of one another.

„ESD in VET aims to empower trainees to co-design sustainable economies that are partly still in the process of development.“

Onto the findings of the monitoring: what is the current state of the anchoring of ESD in VET in the German educational system?

Sustainability is increasingly being viewed as a central programme to the educational sector in Germany. Vocational education has even been called ‘the key to sustainable development’ within the yearly government report on VET. This growing momentum for sustainability has also led to the revising of the set of standardized occupational profiles (“Berufsbildpositionen”) which are of key importance for the sector. In this process, sustainability has become one of the central topics included in all revised training programmes from 2021 on. In many other documents in this area, however, sustainability has not been as comprehensively anchored. While important pioneering work on sustainability has taken place in the context of model projects throughout the last two decades, the systematic transfer into the practice of all fields of occupation remains a considerable challenge.

In the course of the monitoring, interviews with experts and surveys with trainees and educators were carried out. What central insights could be gained into the implementation of ESD in VET from these?

In the interview study, the surveyed experts named important levers for the implementation of ESD in VET. For instance, to achieve more sustainability in vocational education, it is decisive that ESD in VET becomes a central programme in the education and further training of trainers. Another important lever is the holistic orientation of places of learning toward the principles of sustainability. Practically speaking, this ‘whole institution approach’ means that sustainability is lived and in fact exemplified in the training setting itself. These and other approaches to strengthening sustainability would, according to the surveys conducted with trainees, fall on fertile ground among the instructors themselves: in 2018 only about half of the trainees said that they had encountered sustainability during their training. At the same time, however, they would like to see much more ESD and sustainability in their day-to-day life.

What do these findings mean for actors who advocate for the strengthening of ESD in VET?

In order to concretely translate sustainability into the practice of schools and businesses on the ground, joint engagement is needed by various actors, for example trainers, unions, employers’ associations and others. In the end, it is within the companies and vocational schools that trainees can learn to think and act responsibly by confronting sustainability and trade-offs. Here, trainees themselves can actively be involved in the process as co-creators of their own learning with regard to sustainability. This will not only strengthen their creative abilities, but also empower them as change-makers themselves.

„In the end, it is within the companies and vocational schools that trainees can learn to think and act responsibly by confronting sustainability and trade-offs.“

Do you personally see a particular priority regarding any of the mentioned approaches?

In my view, it is vital that ESD in VET not simply complements the tasks to be mastered during training, but rather that sustainability is developed as a fundamental principle for all areas of vocational training and practice. In this way, vocational schools in particular, but really any training centre can be a role model and live sustainability comprehensively in their own organizations. In the end, I believe the aspiration for all actors involved in implementing ESD should be to walk the talk to really translate sustainability into practical action.

RECENT UPDATES FROM THE GERMAN ESD-MONITORING (LINK)

Holst, J., Brock, A., Singer-Brodowski, M., & de Haan, G. (2020). **Monitoring Progress of Change: Implementation of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) within Documents of the German Education System.**

Grund, J., & Brock, A. (2020). **Education for Sustainable Development in Germany: Not Just Desired but Also Effective for Transformative Action.**

Singer-Brodowski, M., von Seggern, J., Duveneck, A., & Etzkorn, N. (2020). **Moving (Reflexively within) Structures. The Governance of Education for Sustainable Development in Germany.**

CONTACT

Jorrit Holst

E-Mail: [holst\(at\)institutfutur.de](mailto:holst(at)institutfutur.de)

URL: www.institutfutur.de