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Berufskolleg an der Lindenstraße: Changing perceptions of TVET professions

i-hubs Innovative Practice

Context

Breaking the norm

For many young people, the path through school and into higher or technical education is often associated with rigid interpretations of what is considered the norm. Instead, what if there were more options that allowed schoolchildren a degree of flexibility in their future educational choices and provided more robust vocational training? Berufskolleg an der Lindenstraße (BKaL) is exploring ways of making this an attractive option.

The BKaL 360 approach

For more than two decades, Germany has seen a steady increase in the number of university entrants annually. At the same time, the number of new apprentices has remained static or even experienced a slight decline. To combat this trend and reinforce the value of technical and vocational education and training (TVET), BKaL has implemented a combined approach to the concept of secondary school, TVET and university certification. The 'BKaL 360' approach is taking hold and changing the local perception of TVET.

Widening the scope of opportunities

Students at BKaL generally fall into two categories: full-time and part-time. Full-time students complete secondary school-leaving certificates to pursue technical or general university studies. Part-time students attend school for two days per week while completing an apprenticeship three days per week. In Germany, these programmes integrate school-based learning with work-based practice in a dual system.

BKaL 360 seeks to combine the opportunities inherent in both the full-time and part-time paths, while ensuring all students can benefit from the institution's TVET expertise, university guidance and linkage with the business community. These efforts begin before students enrol and include alumni outreach. By working within the school's own network and actively making efforts to change the mindset of parents and students who often hold a bias against the vocational path of education, BKaL is attracting more students to pursue studies in TVET.

Enablers of institutional innovation

The following four dimensions of institutional operation represent the evaluation lens that was applied in the selection of this initiative as an Innovative Practice:

Strategy and Management: An institutional strategy is applied to promote the vocational track as a valid and relevant education and career choice. There is also an emphasis on how university and vocational tracks are complimentary and not mutually exclusive.

Teaching and Learning: Teachers and students are involved in peer-to-peer exchange intended to share real-life experiences in TVET studies as part of learning and career orientation for both TVET and university students. Teachers acquire continuing professional development to apply this approach.

Products and Services: Innovative tools and communication methods are utilized to promote TVET as a viable alternative to typical secondary education options.

Ecosystem Relationship Management: New opportunities are created outside the classroom for engagement between students and business contacts, alumni and apprenticeship providers.

Institutional Overview

Berufskolleg an der Lindenstraße (BKaL), Cologne, Germany

Established: 1900

Student body: 3,600 (2020)

Teachers and trainers: 138 (2020)

BKaL is a vocational college offering 16 business and administration programmes in addition to multiple types of university entrance qualifications. The programmes are divided into the technical college for economics, the commercial college and business management school, and the vocational college.

Mission statement: "To develop the competencies of students so they can succeed in an ever-changing world with a holistic approach, modern teaching methods, digital technologies and courses, and career guidance in the fields of business and administration."

The BKaL 360 initiative is backed by a Strategy and Management policy that emphasizes the college's ability to provide the best of both worlds.

Blurring the lines between the university and vocational tracks hinged on a management decision to develop the principles and processes of BKaL 360 in one discipline, then scaling up to others over an extended period of time. This required champions to show the approach, and share the outcome of implementation of this new strategy.

BKaL also needed tools in place to win over one very important audience: the parents of prospective students. Innovative strategies to inform and engage parents were implemented and they were able to effectively showcase the comparative advantage of a BKaL education in terms of labour market outcomes and access to higher education compared with general secondary education.

The commitment and motivation of teachers and students are essential to ensuring changes in the Teaching and Learning dimensions are effective and permanent.

To facilitate the peer-to-peer vocational presentations by dual-system students, teachers needed to adopt a new set of pedagogical methods, such as project-based learning. This involved gaining familiarity with digital tools, while efforts were made to ensure that training was in place to facilitate uptake. A pilot phase in one of the school's departments made rollout in other departments much easier – champions from the pilot phase could lower inhibitions among staff and share learning as other departments were brought on board. BKaL also introduced opportunities for faculty and staff to work together and develop an institution-wide approach to career development.

Curricular concepts, performance evaluation criteria, media concepts, annual didactic planning, and teaching goals were made transparent and accessible to teachers and students alike. Internal stakeholders were therefore all on the same page in terms of expanding the BKaL 360 concept within the school. As a direct result of this project, the institution expects its students to be better-prepared for the changing labour market and to have a smoother transition to working life. With the economic, social, cultural, and ecological skills learned during a holistic course of study, students leave school with a solid sense of purpose and the competencies to shape their own futures.

The focus on new Products and Services creates vehicles and venues for outlining the concept and benefits to new or unfamiliar audiences.

The dual system offered at BKaL – classroom lessons alongside vocational education – is not a new concept in Germany, but one that has become less familiar to local learners and parents. The outreach of BKaL 360 was designed to make the dual system option more appealing. It included specific presentations and opportunities for dialogue that drew attention to the available options – ranging from vocational instruction to university entrance exams – and how these options could be combined.

BKaL promotes the importance of TVET as an education and career choice among learners, teachers, parents and the business community. This is coupled with a comprehensive information and career support system that briefs potential learners before they join the institution, guides their study and career choices while attending, and helps trace and engage graduates during their initial career development.

Throughout their studies, dual-system students are entrusted with creating presentations that inform their full-time peers of the benefits of vocational training and alternative paths to university. By design, this exchange is conducted among peers. The presentations create an opportunity for the dual-system students to reflect on their vocational studies and the link between their classroom and apprenticeship environments.

The rollout of BkaL 360 was a success due to strategic Ecosystem Relationship Management and efforts to engage public and private sector stakeholders.

The institution applied an innovative external communications strategy, which included reaching out through career fairs and alumni networks. This was embraced by business partners who saw BKaL 360 as an opportunity to engage students with the potential to meet the needs of business, while ensuring quality in implementing apprenticeship programmes. BKaL 360 helped renew collaborative partnerships with influential business partners, which in turn contributed to better apprenticeship opportunities for students. The project also led to new avenues of collaboration with primary and pre-secondary schools to ensure that stakeholders – including prospective learners and their parents – were made aware of the educational and professional advantages to be gained from attending BKaL.



Insights

Change the established system to suit the landscape

BKaL's approach to secondary education is innovating the way its students are guided on what to expect in a vocational career and restructuring how TVET learning is facilitated in the institution. However, it also represents a clear understanding of the changing business landscape and the evolving role that TVET needs to play in the lives of young people. The next step for BKaL and its BKaL 360 approach involves expanding the programme to all 16 of the school's disciplines while earning buy-in and increased legitimacy from external stakeholders, namely parents and potential industry partners.

Create a viable option

Parents can be difficult to convince. Many parents are simply unaware that higher education qualifications can be achieved alongside technical and vocational education and training. Part of BKaL's efforts to gain support for their innovative TVET approach is to engage parents while their children are still in primary school. With an early introduction to a less traditional secondary education, parents are more likely to embrace an option such as BKaL 360 when the time comes.

UNESCO-UNEVOC Innovative Practice

BKaL's Innovative Practice is a clear example of an institution that recognized a changing landscape and quickly moved to react. Although nothing had changed in terms of the quality and scope of BKaL's TVET courses, the institution recognized that students were slowly drifting away from these opportunities. The ability to nimbly adapt to ensure the value and relevance of TVET instruction remains visible and understood represents an innovative practice.

Learn more

Lars Lamers, Director of Studies, Berufskolleg an der Lindenstraße (BKaL), helped to compile this document. For more information, contact lamers@bkal.de. To learn more about BKaL, visit <http://www.bkal.de>.

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