

## TUNING UP VOCATIONAL PREPARATION IN PRISON TO PROVIDE EQUAL CHANCES FOR YOUNG OFFENDERS

Having a job is the most important factor in preventing re-offending, but ex-prisoners without vocational qualifications have extremely low chances of finding a job. Many young offenders have had no education or training beyond compulsory school and don't meet the requirements for access to vocational training or work. Getting caught in this vicious circle at such an early stage of their lives can have dramatic consequences for young offenders. However, a German EQUAL Development Partnership, MEMBER, has successfully piloted new forms of vocational preparation inside the prison that match the quality of programmes available to other young people in the outside world.

### A NEW APPROACH TO VOCATIONAL PREPARATION

In 2005, more than 8% of young Germans did not obtain any formal qualification on leaving general education. While this figure has steadily decreased, from almost 10 % in 2001, the chances of these young people accessing vocational training have further deteriorated during the same period. Only 14% of early school leavers entered the Dual Training System in 2005, compared to 19 % in 2001.



Increased efforts have been made, in recent years, to improve the vocational preparation of disadvantaged young people who have not yet acquired those basic skills and competences that would enable them to enter regular initial training. In 2003, new regulations concerning preparation for vocational training were introduced into the German Vocational Training Act, that complemented existing legislation in the fields of initial training, further training and retraining.

These regulations are designed to promote a step by step process of qualification through short modules, which lead young people to the acquisition of vocational competences that can be certified and credited against subsequent initial training in a recognised training occupation. Qualification modules are currently being developed and tested by different providers, mainly outside but also within the school system, to cover a wide range of vocational fields. The Federal Employment Agency, which ensures funding for vocational preparation offered outside the school system, strongly supports the integration of qualification modules into these preparatory programmes and has issued guidelines for the implementation of such modules.

In the Federal State of Brandenburg and in Berlin, the [MEMBER](#) Development Partnership<sup>[1]</sup> (DP) is one of the key actors promoting this new approach to vocational preparation.

### STRENGTHENING PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND MEDIA COMPETENCE AND INTEGRATING YOUNG PRISONERS INTO THE NEW APPROACH



Christian Pfeffer-Hoffmann (right) explaining MEMBER's activities to EU Commissioner Vladimir Špidla during his visit to the DP

A special feature of the DP is that five of its nine projects operate exclusively, or partially, within penal institutions. "There are many good reasons for this double-track approach", explains Christian Pfeffer-Hoffmann, the coordinator of the DP's activities. "By working simultaneously both outside and inside the penal system we can more easily ensure equal quality of vocational preparation in the two contexts and facilitate transfer of good practice into the prisons. Conversely, vocational preparation in prisons must comply with the security and other concerns of the penal system and this framework creates, in a way, 'laboratory conditions' for testing new methods that can then be implemented on a larger scale".

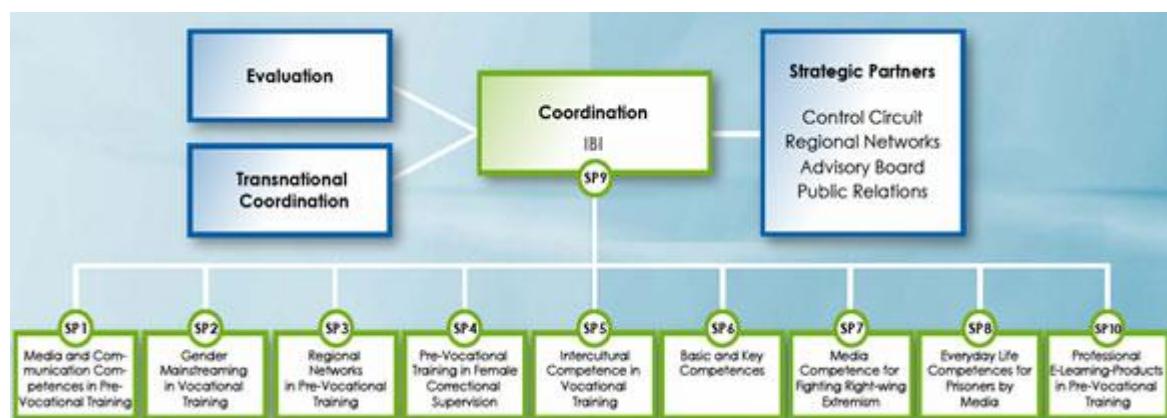


Wilfried Hendricks, Director of IBI

Another innovative aspect of the DP is its particular focus on improving the new qualification modules through introducing essential elements that are not covered in their technical content. "Vocational preparation should include more than pre-vocational qualification in a specific occupational field. We also want to equip disadvantaged young people with the personal and social skills that they need to find their way into training or work, to stay there and to cope with change. The new media are particularly powerful tools for gaining such skills and developing media competence is therefore a thread that runs through all our projects" says Wilfried Hendricks, Professor at the Technical University of Berlin and Director of the Institute for Education in the Information Society (IBI) which is the Managing Organisation of the DP.

MEMBER promotes a broad concept of vocational preparation that is geared to subsequent initial training but, which also develops young people's capacity to adapt to changing requirements in the training market and the world of work. By closely associating a number of penal institutions with its work, the DP seeks to ensure that the quality of vocational preparation for young people in prison is equal to that of their peers and also that it provides a stable bridge to sustainable training on their release.

To develop and implement this approach, IBI brought together a wide range of [strategic partners](#), including the relevant Ministries of the Federal States of Brandenburg and Berlin (Education, Employment, and Justice), the Regional Employment Agency and a number of other organisations. They are all involved, in various ways, in the MEMBER Steering Committee, the Advisory Board and in the thematic working groups that ensure networking between the different DP activities and also support the mainstreaming of the DP's outcomes. The work of the DP is organised in nine different [sub-projects \(SPs\)](#), whilst the overall coordination is ensured by IBI.



## MUCH REMAINS TO BE DONE

Two major aims of the DP are not yet reflected in the action plans. These are tackling the gender pay gap and introducing a gender dimension into strategies for improved health and safety at

work. Specific working groups have studied these two issues and have produced a survey on health and safety conditions and another on the wages paid to women and men in the 19 organisations. Both surveys reveal that legal obligations are generally being respected. There were only few cases of discrimination that related to levels of pay, but in-depth case studies indicated that there was a need to address the principle of equal pay for comparable work. There were more obvious concerns about health and safety issues. It appears that when women are worried about the security of their jobs, they may be prepared to accept working conditions that are harmful to their health. In one factory, the survey discovered pregnant women dealing with toxic agents and in another female workers were regularly lifting iron bars weighing over 30 kilos. Then, there was a problem with a ceramics company in which women were prohibited from working close to the ovens and this restriction blocked their access to better paid jobs. The problem could have been resolved if the employer had purchased new safety equipment but he felt he could not make the financial investment. However, there were encouraging responses from three enterprises, which were immediately prepared to redress the deficiencies highlighted by the survey. In addition, five companies with particularly problematical health and safety conditions agreed that the DP should carry out a second analysis in greater depth and, if necessary, negotiate appropriate improvements with the Work's Council.

## **ADDRESSING THE PARTICULAR NEEDS OF YOUNG OFFENDERS IN VOCATIONAL PREPARATION**

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Developing equal opportunities for all young people in vocational preparation and integrating the use of ICT into the new qualification modules is a common transversal objective in all sub-projects. However, each of the five projects operating in prisons (SPs 4 – 8) also reflects a distinct aspect of competence development amongst young offenders and some examples of this work are described below.

### **Individualising Pre-Vocational Training for Young Female Offenders**

This project ([SP4](#)) has introduced a flexible approach to offering a vocational perspective to young inmates of the women's prison in Berlin. The relatively small number, and the relatively short sentences, of young female offenders make it difficult to bring them together in continuous learning groups that have homogeneous needs and interests. MEMBER has developed and tested a new modular training concept which enables the young women to enter the programme individually, at any given time. The first step of this programme is a personal assessment and diagnosis which then provides the basis for the establishment of an individualised learning plan. The learning modules are complemented by work experience placements in the prison's workshops. This approach requires considerable coordinating abilities and a strong commitment on the part of the prison staff. MEMBER has therefore organised training, advice and coaching sessions to help the staff to prepare, implement and evaluate the individual learning plans. This has also led to a new cooperative project with the prison for young male offenders in Berlin, which enables both young women and young men to learn about, and tackle, gender stereotypes and role models through a common website (see SP 5 below).

The products of this project comprise curricula and back-up resources in the form of print and IT materials on selected themes including methods of competence assessment, media competence, anti-racism and communication. These outputs were complemented by several tools that facilitate the involvement of prison staff at all levels such as an outline of framework conditions and work processes, and others including the use of video and audio, case study and portfolio approaches that have mobilised them for the development and implementation of new qualification modules.

The new concept has proved successful. Two thirds of the 30 young women who participated in the project in 2006 found a job in the prison companies or went on to further training, whilst the other ten participants were released or transferred to another prison. The individualised training programme has now been introduced as a central feature of vocational preparation in the prison that will continue after completion of the MEMBER DP.

### **Developing Intercultural Competence**

This project ([SP 5](#)) covers considerable new ground. "*Until recently, work on intercultural issues has not been given much attention in this institution, although more than half of the 600 young people who are in here are from ethnic minority or migrant backgrounds,*" explains Birgit Lang from the MEMBER team in Berlin's youth prison. "*Now we have a clear strategy to foster training and learning through multicultural learning groups*". This approach seeks to integrate new

aspects into the prison's vocational preparation and training programmes. These novel elements are intercultural learning modules that are used for instruction in social studies, a German language course for Germans and non-Germans, workshop projects and role playing in multi-cultural teams. In addition, preparatory work has started for the training of Intercultural Peer Mediators who will help to reconcile the conflicts that can arise in the learning groups.



GittaSpitta rappers are effective communicators

A particularly forceful and successful element of the project's work on media competence has been the creation of a Hip-Hop platform and its rap band "*GittaSpitta*". This platform offers the young prisoners an appropriate medium for self-presentation and for self-expression through words rather than through violence. "Sometimes a small pebble can set a huge landslide rolling. The landslide I'm talking about is not one of stones but one of words, but I can say these words are stronger than stone", states Sascha G., one of the band members who sets his feelings to music. The platform also has a clear vocational component, as through its CD and video productions it provides practical experience related to professional training and occupations in the field of "Music and Event." This is a sector in which the traditionally strong and rapidly expanding creative industries of the Berlin-Brandenburg region offer new opportunities. *GittaSpitta* has already gained some publicity outside the prison both during and after its performance on the *International Days against Racism and Discrimination*, in March 2006 and in March 2007.

However, the project's work is not confined to its activities within the prison walls. "Our whole approach is based on intensive cooperation with teachers from the vocational schools in Berlin and with other groups and organisations outside the prison that can contribute to our work", says Klaus-Dieter Vogel, the prison's course coordinator, and he also adds that "we intend to transfer our training kit to the vocational schools and for many of them the new forms of vocational preparation and the use of qualification modules are a new field in which they have very limited experience". Close working links are also maintained with the MEMBER sub-project 1 which produces modules and teaching and learning materials to develop media and communication competence in the pre-vocational training offered in two large districts of the Brandenburg region.

Strong links have also been forged with the MEMBER project on Media Competence for Fighting Right-wing Extremism (SP 7). "We have a number of common interests", explains Judy Korn, who works on this sub-project. "Over several years we have observed a growth in violent offences that have a right-wing extremist motive, often combined with overt racism. The situation in prisons provides a fertile breeding ground for such attitudes which increasingly intersect with a manifestation of religious fundamentalism. The curricula and materials that we produce help teachers and trainers to argue with extremist positions and are therefore welcomed by operators in the prisons, especially as they are well suited for use in intercultural training for young offenders."

### Using IT-Media to increase Everyday Life Competence

Within this project (SP 8), experts from the MEMBER team, teachers and instructors operating in prisons and the young people with whom they work jointly test and use learning software that helps young ex-offenders prepare for their release. Entitled "*KiA - Kompetent im Alltag*" (capable of coping with everyday life), the new software includes modules for competence development in nine different fields, such as work with a computer, contact with public authorities, job-seeking and house-hunting, handling financial issues and the use of spare time. It builds on similar work initiated under the ADAPT and Employment Community Initiatives which preceded EQUAL, e.g. on the results of the *Telis* project. "The '*Telis*' software provided a good starting point, but it was

*mainly aimed at adults and we had to make it suitable for work with young people. Its content was predominantly based on text, whereas KiA works with a wider range of media,"* explains the project leader, Sabine Schuller. KiA is complemented by a "Media Kit", which contains games and visual models that support the use of the software.

Project activities are closely coordinated with the joint development and use of IT-based learning systems that take place within the framework of the "[RESO-Northern Alliance](#)" (RESO-Nordverbund), which emerged from work in EQUAL round 1 and in which the Ministries of Justice from seven Federal States in the northern part of Germany cooperate on education, training and labour-market programmes for the social integration of offenders.

### **Disseminating Materials, Tools and Information on Successful Practice through Web-based Access for Teachers, Trainers and Multipliers**

Outcomes of MEMBER are made widely available and disseminated in different ways. All products resulting from the work of the individual sub-projects are accessible through the [results page](#) of the DP's website, including printed and electronic materials, curricula and training concepts, tools, recommendations and reports and information on the nature of the innovations that have been introduced by the DP. The products are categorised by the different target groups to whom they are addressed including young people inside and outside the penal institutions, pedagogical staff in prisons, teachers and trainers in schools and vocational preparation programmes, multipliers and decision makers. This helps interested users to navigate through the wide range of products easily and to identify quickly those that are most relevant for their own work.

In addition, MEMBER offers, through its [web-based portal](#), access to other electronic materials that it has found to be useful in vocational preparation programmes. These also complement the resources that MEMBER has developed.

Finally, MEMBER is engaged in close cooperation with a specialised publishing house on the development of e-learning modules that are tailored to the needs of disadvantaged young people in vocational preparation programmes ([SP\\_10](#)). As a result of this cooperation, many of the outcomes and experiences of the DP will also be made available through the ever growing e-learning market.

## **TRANSNATIONAL COOPERATION**

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The MEMBER sub-projects are actively involved in the [Hugin](#) Transnational Partnership (TP), together with DPs from the Netherlands, Malta, and Poland. All partners share a common interest in improving the life chances of young people who have not had access to initial education and training and of those who are remanded in custody or may be at risk of offending. Cooperation in the Hugin TP focuses on the joint development and transnational transfer of products that address four practical thematic aspects: recruiting-retention-motivation, new approaches to embedded learning, the use of DVD media and IT-Portal solutions.

In addition, MEMBER is a partner in the new German NEON (National EQUAL Offender Network) which includes all German DPs working with ex-offenders. NEONs have also already been launched in the [United Kingdom](#) and the Netherlands. These networks build on the experience of [cooperation between "ex-offender" DPs](#) in the first Round of EQUAL and have established a stable platform for increasing the impact of DPs in Round 2. Several other Member States including Italy, Poland and Portugal have also created similar networks. These NEONs are now collaborating transnationally so that they can more effectively exploit European experience for their own work in their respective national contexts.

The new transnational cooperation provides a linchpin for implementing the European Programme for [Mainstreaming](#) the outcomes from EQUAL in this thematic field. The most recent milestone in this programme was the [EQUAL Policy Forum on \(Ex\)-offenders](#) that was held in Warsaw, on 21 and 22 June 2007. The MEMBER DP contributed to the [Passport to Freedom Conference](#) in Lisbon, in October 2006, which brought together 55 DPs to gather evidence of the successful practices that have been tested in EQUAL, which formed the basis for [recommendations](#) presented at the Policy Forum in Warsaw.

### **Three Important Lessons from MEMBER**

The operators in the MEMBER team believe that:

1. *"Cross-linking our approach to improving young people's personal and vocational competence within prisons with our work outside has generated advantages for both sides: for young offenders, because they become familiar with new processes similar to those that they will experience after their release; and for those concerned with introducing new forms of vocational preparation into the education and training system, because they benefit from the transfer of tools and materials that we were able to test under experimental conditions in the penal institution;"*
2. *A key to the success of our work in prisons was the offer of training and support to prison staff, and their full involvement from the beginning. In the future, such training should be compulsory;*
3. *The networking of regional and local actors has been crucial in establishing common standards and ensuring regional coherence in implementing the new qualification modules for vocational preparation, both within the penal system and outside."*

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[Link to EQUAL database description](#)