Vocational training in the administration of the German Bundestag

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The Administration of the German Bundestag is a supreme federal authority. Employing around 2500 staff, it is dedicated to providing services for Parliament, its various bodies and the individual Members of the German Bundestag.

This broad remit and the range of staff required to fulfil it - from semi-skilled workers to civil servants with higher professional training or university degrees, and from administrative staff with many years of experience to the new recruit - create the framework for the delivery of appropriate training to the Administration's workforce. The Personnel Management and Development Guidelines of the Administration of the German Bundestag, which came into force in 1994, state that staff "should have the opportunity to undertake initial and vocational training appropriate to their work and function and in line with their abilities, service requirements and professional development", "also in order to enable them to benefit from available opportunities for professional advancement and obtain the qualifications necessary to progress to other posts". These in-service Guidelines also state that "every staff member should endeavour, on their own initiative, to develop their knowledge and skills further". This can take place through initial, vocational and further training.

Before turning to the issue of vocational training, which is the main subject of my paper, I should like to say a few words about the various initial and further training opportunities offered within the Administration.

The Administration offers 23 training places for young people. 21 of these places are currently assigned to persons who are training as "office communications clerks" - in conjunction with two private-sector companies - or "specialist administrative employees". Two training places are reserved for young journalists acquiring the "tools of the trade" on a two-year training course with the editorial board of the newspaper "Das Parlament". In future - once the Administration has completed its relocation following the German Bundestag's move from Bonn to Berlin - the Administration is considering the option of taking on all training delivery itself once again, including the provision of initial training in the IT and media professions, and if necessary in the manual trades (motor mechanics, electricians, gardeners).

Further training is intended to provide additional service-relevant general qualifications. Basic training in administration (known as Employee Training I) and the opportunity to qualify as a specialist administrative employee are offered to clerical and manual workers alike. These training programmes generally last for two to three years and are delivered by external training providers or the Academy of Administration of Land Berlin. They equip the target groups with the skills necessary for future appointment to more senior and responsible posts in the Administration. Civil servants have specific opportunities to prepare for progression into higher career grades (promotion) based on training or experience in post. Induction into the new career grade covers both theoretical and practical training.

Vocational training, which I would like to focus on in the rest of this paper, is designed to safeguard the efficiency and effectiveness of a competent and motivated workforce and enhance their performance, potential and opportunities for development. It also plays a role in
supporting special projects, such as the modernization of the Administration or the introduction of new technology.

In order to adapt and develop the skills and knowledge of the workforce of the Administration of the German Bundestag, the staff, line managers, personnel sections and the Training Section - supported by training officers - work together in an ongoing process.

The General Service Regulations for the Administration of the German Bundestag state that staff have a duty to carry out their appointed tasks in a competent manner. They are thus obliged to attend training courses to maintain and improve the skills required in their current post. In addition, staff are also obliged to keep informed, through appropriate vocational training, about increased or changing requirements of their career or area of work.

We see the individual staff member not as someone who carries out orders but as a valuable professional who can play a role in shaping developments in the workplace. Individual initiative is required and encouraged. Every individual has a stake in, and a share of responsibility for, their own professional development.

As part of their management role, line managers have a duty to identify the training needs of each staff member in their team, based on the specific requirements of the post held and the skills and suitability of the individual concerned.

One of the line managers' key tasks is thus to support the provision of vocational training for their staff pro-actively by encouraging them to participate in training events.

The personnel sections monitor individual staff members' potential and skills/knowledge gaps through in-service assessments, references, interviews and personal discussions. This information can be used to devise personal development plans and support the provision of targeted training.

The Training Section is responsible for the central coordination and management of in-service training. Its task and objective are to provide a range of prompt, effective, efficient and tailor-made vocational training courses.

The Training Section

- provides information on the range of vocational training opportunities;
- advises staff on matters relating to vocational training (including the selection of courses and learning methods);
- records and analyses the training needs identified, devises strategies for specific training measures, and - taking available resources into account - decides on the method of delivery (e.g. in-house training, outsourcing to external training providers);
- selects participants, involving the Equal Opportunities Officer, the Personnel Council and if necessary the disabled employees' link officer in this process, and draws up priority lists if the course is oversubscribed;
- initiates, organizes and monitors in-house training events and selects the training providers and/or lecturers, venue and timetable;
- establishes contact with the training provider, concludes contracts - if necessary involving the Administration's Contracts Section - and/or registers staff on a legally binding basis for the course;
assigns staff to the training provider and authorizes travel;
evaluates the training outcomes, and
assesses - together with line managers - employees' success in implementing what they have learned.

In performing these tasks, the Training Section is supported by training officers who are appointed for the larger organizational units, generally the directorates. Their tasks within their specific organization units can be summarized as follows:

- Identifying and analysing training needs;
- Participating in the development of specific training events in response to the training needs identified;
- Participating in the evaluation of training courses (especially long-term transfer control);
- Providing information on training opportunities;
- Participating in drawing up priority lists for attendance at training courses.

On issues relating to training and personnel development, the training officers act as the "interface" between their organizational unit and the Training Section.

The role of training officer should be assigned to a qualified member of staff who:

- is interested in training issues and is willing to undergo vocational training in this field,
- has many years of experience within the Administration in a variety of roles;
- is familiar with and understands the organizational structure, processes and working methods of the Administration of the German Bundestag, based on many years of experience in-house;
- is valued and recognized by line managers and staff members;
- has strong negotiating skills, and
- is able to cope with the stress of taking on this role alongside their normal professional activities.

Candidates for the role of training officers are identified by the head of the individual directorate or organizational unit, based on a survey of interest. S/he then proposes a candidate from among the staff who have expressed interest. Prior to formal appointment, the Equal Opportunities Officer and the Personnel Council have an opportunity to voice their views.

The training officers are appointed by the Head of the Administration, i.e. the Secretary-General of the German Bundestag, for a period of three years, with the option of extension. Their induction into their new role is undertaken by the Training Section.

Close cooperation and a regular exchange of information and ideas take place between the Training Section and the training officers, who undergo appropriate training in the relevant issues.

The Equal Opportunities Officer, the Personnel Council and the disabled employees' link officer also support the training officers in matters relating to in-service vocational training. Their proposals flow into the planning of training courses.

In accordance with the Federal Equal Opportunities Act [Bundesgleichstellungsgesetz], the Equal Opportunities Officer must be involved at an early stage before delivery of training. Under the Federal Personnel Representation Act [Bundespersonalvertretungsgesetz], the Per-
sonnel Council has a right to have a say regarding the participants in training events. The disabled employees' link officer must be informed about a disabled employee's attendance at a training course and, if necessary, must be given a hearing in accordance with Book IX of the Social Code.

So how are training needs identified?

Budget regulations stipulate that the financial and personnel resources allocated for the provision of initial and vocational training must be used in an appropriate manner. This requires targeted investment in vocational training in areas where there is an urgent need, and the provision of tailored measures which achieve the desired outcomes.

This requires, at least in the medium term, a systematic needs analysis based on an individual profile comparison and extending to staff development and promotion. In a profile comparison, the specific abilities, knowledge and skills required in a job (known as the "job profile") are matched with the individual employee's skills and suitability (the "skills profile"). Any shortfalls or "skills gaps" can be reduced or, indeed, removed through the provision of training. Similarly, when the staff member's skills exceed the demands of the post, training can be provided in order to maximize the employee's potential and increase their motivation.

I would not deny that the Administration of the German Bundestag is not yet in a position to carry out a comprehensive and targeted needs analysis at present. This requires close cooperation between the Organization Section and the personnel sections in order to produce a detailed and up-to-date job profile for every post and a skills profile for potential employees in all these areas. This is one of the tasks which must be tackled in future following the implementation of the vocational training strategy, which is now available in draft and is currently being negotiated with the workforce representatives, the disabled employees' representatives, and the Equal Opportunities Officer. The instruments currently available to identify training needs include employees’ annual reviews, advice sessions, needs analysis, notification of needs, and statistical evaluations.

In accordance with the Personnel Management and Development Guidelines, the employee reviews, which take the form of discussions between individual staff members and their line managers, must take place once a year. During these reviews, "the staff member's professional objectives, interests and plans should be discussed, along with suitable measures to promote these goals".

The Employee' Annual Review Guidelines of 23 April 2002 also state that

- the individual staff member's professional objectives, interests and plans - taking account of the available opportunities - and agreement on appropriate advancement measures are a key aspect of the employee review, and
- specific agreements on vocational training and development measures may be set out in writing as a record of outcomes.

Advice on training matters is generally provided, first and foremost, by the staff from the Training Section. As mentioned above, they are supported by the training officers. They support the line managers who focus on the aspect of personal development in the annual staff review. For this purpose, the Section has drawn up a check-list for use in planning vocational training. In addition, requests for training for individuals or groups can be submitted to the
Training Section at any time, giving reasons and an assessment of the urgency of the training needs. The Training Section also carries out its own target-group-specific needs assessments in order to obtain detailed information on the level of interest and appropriate content of training courses. The Training Section is also required to collect statistics, e.g. on attendance of part-time staff and women in training events. Greater efforts are now being made to identify new or existing training needs as part of quality assurance and transfer control as well.

The Training Section endeavours to enable as many staff as possible to attend vocational training, depending on the available resources and places, and mindful of the urgency of other training needs. As resources are limited, every effort is made to ensure a fair distribution of training places within the Administration, between the various functional levels and staff groups, and between the sexes.

In selecting and prioritizing participants, the key criteria are the type of training and the urgency of the training need.

The training courses are classified as:

- job-related,
- function-related, and
- general.

Job-related training includes all training necessary for the requirements of a specific job and performance by the current or - if a staff changeover is planned - future post-holder.

If knowledge and skills are required for the performance of a specific function/special tasks (e.g. Officer responsible for Document Secrecy, Officer responsible for Monitoring Corruption, Equal Opportunities Officer, line managers), the training should be categorized as function-related.

General vocational training measures include those which are primarily intended to promote general personnel development or the acquisition of key qualifications.

Staff whose vocational training is categorized as work-related and/or function-related take priority over candidates who are interested in general training.

If the employee has been refused a (comparable) training place on one or more occasions due to a shortage of places, this is taken into account in the selection/prioritization process.

Further selection criteria which may apply, depending on the individual case, include:

- the duration and level of intensity of work;
- the length of service with the Administration of the German Bundestag and/or one of its organizational units;
- number of training courses already attended within a specific period, compared with other candidates for training;
- social factors (e.g. part-time employment, leave of absence/special leave for family reasons, disability) and
- for follow-up seminars: the time elapsed since the induction seminar.
Who organizes and delivers the training courses?

Training needs should, on principle, be met by the federal training providers, especially the Federal Academy of Public Administration which is run by the Federal Ministry of the Interior, the Federal College of Public Administration, and the Federal Office of Languages or the Bundestag's own in-house PARLAKOM User Service Centre.

In addition to the Federal Academy of Public Administration, the Federal College of Public Administration, and the Federal Office of Languages, a number of other vocational training agencies exist at federal level (e.g. the Federal Academy of Finance, the Federal Foreign Office Training Centre). However, they are of little or no importance in the provision of in-service training to the staff of the Bundestag Administration.

The range of training courses run by the Federal Academy of Public Administration and the Federal College of Public Administration - which are central federal training agencies - are extremely important.

The task of the Federal Academy of Public Administration, in close cooperation with administration, the business community and academia, is to provide relevant training for the staff of the federal administration. The current range of courses includes training:

- for professional development (e.g. job-related vocational training courses, skills training for future managers);
- to modernize the administration;
- in information technology;
- using new media (e.g. learning programmes);
- for leadership, and
- relating to European integration and international cooperation.

The primary task of the Federal College of Public Administration is to train civil servants from the higher intermediate non-technical service. It also runs job-related vocational training courses in specific fields.

The training courses provided by the Federal Academy of Public Administration and the Federal College of Public Administration are open in principle to all staff from the Bundestag Administration. The annual programme of the Federal Academy of Public Administration, and the vocational training programme, entitled "Law and Administrative Practice", issued by the Federal College of Public Administration are notified to staff through the in-house bulletin at the time of publication and are available in every organizational unit, from the training officers, and in the Training Section in book form. Details of the training programmes, last-minute availability of places, and new/additional training courses offered by the Federal Academy and the Federal College are also published on the Intranet.

To enhance its staff's cross-cultural skills, the Administration of the German Bundestag works with the Federal Office of Languages, which offers a range of foreign-language courses tailored to students' level of knowledge. They include general intensive courses lasting six or twelve weeks in all the languages taught at the Federal Office of Languages; general language courses in "combined" courses consisting of a two-week contact phase and three months of self-study (French/English); inter-ministerial language tuition in English and French in the form of general and specialist in-service language tuition, comprising one or two three-
hour teaching units per week over a six-month period; and intensive specialized language tuition lasting between two days and two weeks.

The in-house PARLAKOM User Service Centre offers Members of the Bundestag and their staff, in particular, a comprehensive range of vocational training options in the field of information technology (e.g. basic courses, MS standard software). Depending on the number of places available, Administration staff can also attend these seminars.

If the demand for vocational training cannot be met by the federal training providers or the PARLAKOM User Service Centre, and if appropriate budgetary resources are available, other public training providers (e.g. the Berlin Academy of Administration) are approached in preference to external agencies (e.g. training companies or external tutors).

If a larger group requires training (at least 12 participants in the case of behaviour-related training, and 15 for all other subjects) or if there is a need for special vocational training which must be tailored to the needs of the Bundestag Administration, the provision of in-house training is considered as an option.

In-housing training covers all activities relating to in-service training (e.g. seminars, information events) provided for staff of the Bundestag Administration - preferably on the Bundestag's own premises - and is organized and monitored by the Training Section, sometimes drawing on external expertise.

This form of training is used, in particular, when training or information events are required for specific target groups of Administration staff, e.g. for concierges, Members' assistants, or the Bundestag police and security officers. This training approach is also used when training is required following the adoption of directives or in-service agreements which apply solely to the Administration of the German Bundestag. At present, these include the Directive on the management of staff at risk of or suffering from addiction (Addiction Directive), the Directive on the prevention of corruption, and the In-Service Agreement on the protection of staff and gender-neutral conduct in the workplace.

This year, the Administration developed its own vocational training strategy based on the Personnel Management and Development Guidelines which came into force in 1994. This strategy is currently being negotiated with the Equal Opportunities Officer, the Personnel Council and the representatives of disabled employees. It describes, for example, the courses which should be attended by staff in all four career streams to achieve what are known as "key" qualifications, the knowledge and skills required by staff who are about to take on, or have already taken on, a management role, and provides information for specific groups of staff, such as part-time workers, the disabled, and shift workers. The vocational training strategy is thus both a guide and a guideline on in-service vocational training for persons working in the Administration of the German Bundestag.

Let me conclude with the following thoughts:

When we hear the words "learning" or "vocational training", we immediately think of the traditional method of imparting knowledge through seminars. Yet the learning process takes place all the time in daily life, either consciously or subconsciously. We learn from discussions, reports, books, the Internet or even through personal experience at work or by watching our colleagues.
For organized and planned study, learning methods include shared learning at seminars, information events/lectures, workshops/follow-up, coaching/individual tuition and role plays. There are also multi-media learning options for individuals through self-study, correspondence courses, audio courses (cassettes for learning at home or while out and about), educational films, computer-aided learning, and the Internet.

As a mixed method, some training providers offer self-study programmes combined with practical workshops. There are also many forms of self-organized learning - from exchange of experience to study groups.

The Administration of the German Bundestag supports and promotes media-assisted learning, especially through individual study programmes. They offer the opportunity for students to learn at their own pace in the workplace. There is no need to send staff away on a course, and the learning programme can be tailored to the individual's work and personal requirements. If the staff members do not have the appropriate technical equipment at their workplace, or prefer to study undisturbed in a quiet environment, the Training Section has set up a specially-equipped study centre for this purpose.

In conclusion: the Administration of the German Bundestag hopes that its vocational training strategy will enable it to focus more intensively on quality assurance and transfer control, and thus ensure that its vocational training provision helps to create a well-qualified, effective and happy workforce.

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