

## **The Adult Education Centre – Education as a Public Responsibility (Condensed Version)**

### **Indispensable and unmistakable**

Everyone knows the Adult Education Centres. Every year about 9 million people attend over 700,000 courses in general, professional, cultural and political education. Knowledge and the ability to apply the acquired knowledge must also be constantly updated and expanded over the course of a life. With the courses they offer the Adult Education Centres support the process of Lifelong Learning. They stand by people in an increasingly complex world in order to help them participate actively in society, culture and employment and to take over responsibility for themselves and make their lives meaningful. The success story of the Adult Education Centres is inextricably linked with a living democracy. They stand for the right to Lifelong Learning, for equity in education and a comprehensive understanding of education.

706,000 courses\*  
9,200,000 participants

\*Courses, single events, lectures, field trips, excursions and study tours (rounded-off figures from VHS statistics 2009)

### **Anchored in the community and always nearby**

The Adult Education Centre is everywhere. In the cities, towns and counties in Germany, the Adult Education Centre is the proven core institution of communal life in the area of further education and an important guarantor of a citizen-oriented educational infrastructure. The continuing education hub, Adult Education Centre is concurrently a place of learning as well as a defining social and cultural meeting place for everyone. Adult Education Centres are mandated by states and municipalities to make a responsive and affordable supply of further education available, which can be taken advantage of by everyone without the need to overcome barriers. Adult Education Centres are administered by local self-government and are democratically legitimised. In addition to this public education remit, they also support their communities by providing cross-carrier training advice related to job market goals as well as the implementation of social policy objectives.

With nearly 1,000 independent facilities and another 3,000 field offices, the Adult Education Centres form a nationwide network of unique further education and cultural institutions near residential areas. In rural areas, the Adult Education Centres are often the only accessible providers of further education.

Total Adult Education Centres: 940  
Total field offices: 3,237  
Number of Adult Education Centres and field offices in Germany  
(Data from VHS statistics 2009)

### **Continuing education for all**

Adult Education Centres are open to everyone, open to people of all social strata and income groups, all backgrounds and cultures, for people with and without disabilities. They are open to people with different or opposing views. Learning sites in neighbourhoods and accessible rooms make the offers of the Adult Education Centres not only accessible but particularly attractive for their target group. The Adult Education Centres also implement their public mission with a social component. They work economically, but are not profit-oriented. Attendance figures are impressive proof of the success of this approach.

### **Second chance and remedial education**

Adult Education Centres are competence hubs for further education. In Germany, even today, educational success depends largely on social and ethnic origin. In order to change this, every adult – regardless of their income – must have a guaranteed possibility to acquire remedial basic school or

vocational education qualifications. The Adult Education Centres make an important contribution: They offer adults, functional illiterates and thousands of young people who have left school without a successful qualification a second chance through their basic education and certificate programs.

### **Multilingualism and integration**

The increasing internationalization of business and culture, the increasing mobility in Europe, the need for social integration in the face of active migration constantly requires better language skills and intercultural competencies. The Adult Education Centre is the largest German language school, with offers of more than 50 languages and about 1.8 million participants yearly.

As the largest partner of the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees, the Adult Education Centres offer about 3 million teaching hours nationwide for language and social integration for people with an immigrant background. Federal and state governments have mandated the Adult Education Centres, because of their reliability and competence, to carry out the citizenship test as a prerequisite for the acquisition of German citizenship.

### **Employment and training capability**

Professional qualification and preparation for recognised certificates are an integral part of Adult Education Centre work. In recent years, millions of employees have used the Adult Education Centre offers for the acquisition of IT skills – an impressive economic development program. The Adult Education Centres also offer systematic learning in courses and trainings to acquire specific cross-professional or industry skills, such as for various commercial and service occupations. Additionally, they also conduct labour market as well as social projects and activities – always based on regional needs. This is not done only with an eye toward short-term skill acquisition, but in order to lay the foundations for sustainable learning.

### **Health and Quality of Life**

People want to grow old in good health. Many of them want to acquire enhanced skills in order to maintain their health and their quality of life. Given the fact of over 2 million course participants annually in preventive health education, Adult Education Centres contribute significantly to cost reduction in health care. Due to their comprehensive quality development, health education at Adult Education Centres even finds a high degree of acceptance with companies and health insurance providers.

### **Culture and creativity**

Over 1 million people a year take advantage of the offers for cultural education. They take on cultural knowledge to discover and develop their own artistic and creative potential. Cultural education opens up alternative spaces for experience and promotes personality development. This is not exclusively for an elite group. Creativity and cultural skills support social communication and quality of life in the community. A special role of the Adult Education Centre is its close working relationship with artists, cultural institutions, libraries, and socio-cultural centres in the community.

### **Political participation and civic engagement**

Citizens are often very direct when confronted with pressing political and social issues and conflicts in their community. Discussion forums, history and future-oriented workshops or even dialogue events with policy makers therefore complement the basic aspects of political education. Adult Education Centres work locally and promote global thinking. They provide a space for political education which aims to strengthen the power of political discernment and the skill to take action. An increase in importance delineates a particular form of participation: civic engagement. Here, Adult Education Centres offer advice, training and support.

Basic education/education qualifications 2%
Politics, society, environment 7.8%
Health 31%
Culture and Design 15.9%
Labour & Employment 12.7%
Language courses 30.6%

Percentile distribution of courses offered by program areas  
(from VHS statistics 2009)

## **The main tasks for the Adult Education Centre of the future**

### **1. Provide for more equity in education**

No person shall be excluded from Lifelong Learning due to social or ethnic origin or due to previous failure in the school system. Those who live far away from learning centres, low skilled and low-income groups need to be targeted, have better educational support and additional offers, particularly in the areas of literacy, basic education and remedial courses for education certificates. In addition to that, these socially beneficial offers need to be expanded because they are of particular importance for social cohesion and the future development of the country. This includes, for example, political, language, intercultural, health and environmental education, and family and parent education. Adult Education Centres will continue to pursue tasks that are of particular public interest and serve to foster greater educational opportunities.

### **2. Promote further intercultural education**

Germany will remain a destination country for immigration. To cope with the increasing requirements for integration, the Adult Education Centres are developing into intercultural training and meeting centres. They are increasing their offers for the social, cultural and economic integration of people with immigrant backgrounds. They are increasingly strengthening their efforts in teaching foreign languages and intercultural skills. And they are working to make their own program, organisational and staff development more interculturally aligned.

### **3. Foster the potential for skilled workers**

In many sectors the demand for skilled workers is growing. A special contribution of the Adult Education centres toward the qualification of professionals is to promote untapped financing resources for the education of different target groups. Adult Education Centres are creating new paths for learning and educational consulting, for documentation and certification of existing competencies of participants in the addressing of target groups, in the preparation for training and professional qualifications as well as for university education. In addition to that, the Adult Education Centres will further modularise their career-related and interdisciplinary offers, align themselves to European and national frames of reference and include themselves in cooperative qualification networks – also in the interest of improving the permeability of the education system.

### **4. Targeted support for people of all ages**

“Fewer – older – more colourful” – that is how the consequences of demographic change for the population structure can be summarised. The open-ended age range educational offers of the Adult Education Centres ensures social participation and quality of life at any age. Adult Education Centres also respond with a differentiated age-appropriate education which takes into account not only to the different stages of ageing, but also to the various educational interests and social orientations of the participants. They build their programs for older people who enjoy learning with people in a similar situation in life. This includes job-related offers for older workers. At the same time they intensify their efforts to support and better target the education of young people. As institutions of Lifelong Learning, Adult Education Centres are predisposed to provide educational opportunities across generations.

### **5. Expand municipal education networks**

Only close cooperation between all educational stakeholders and the integration of their service power leads to adequate and high quality care for all age groups in the region with training and learning opportunities throughout their lives. Adult Education Centres therefore support the development of local and regional educational networks. They bring to the table their extensive experience in innovative projects, network moderation and their strong partnerships with universities, schools, employment agencies, job centres for welfare recipients, churches, associations, unions and chambers. Due to this ability to cooperate and their historical orientation, they can accompany people throughout their educational life. The Adult Education Centres are thus important actors in local education policy.

## **The public sector's responsibility**

The benchmark for future-oriented education policies is the establishment of equal living conditions in all cities, municipalities and counties throughout the Federal Republic and the ambitious educational goal of increasing the participation in continuing education in Germany from the current 43% to 50%, and for the low-skilled from 28% to 40% by 2015. In the past, Germany placed too little emphasis on quality education and education for all. To compete on an international scale, it needs a open, equal-opportunity, efficient and cooperative system of Lifelong Learning.

The Adult Education Centres do their share by developing their own potential and optimising their resources. Their work is dependent on reliable funding. However, a stronger financial commitment from federal, state and local governments for public education is also necessary. They have a duty to ensure that the goal of implementing Lifelong Learning for all is not just political rhetoric.

## **Investments in Adult Education Centres pay off**

- Adult Education Centres are the only further education providers with comprehensive offers that take into account the educational potentialities and learning interests of as many people as possible in different phases of life, maintain collaborations with other institutions of Lifelong Learning and thereby promote the community as a residential and business location;
- Adult Education Centres confront current social problems flexibly, help their participants to survive transitions, recruit the disadvantaged for further education, and implement regional or nationwide education campaigns in the public interest;
- With their objectives – education for all, education in collective basic skills for civil society, support for all existing potentialities – Adult Education Centres meet the threat of a widening social gap head on;
- Adult Education Centres, compared to all similar institutions, work more cost-effectively now and will do so in the future, while returning more to society than what they cost;
- Adult Education Centres are competent, highly innovative, educational institutions, which implement the principle of Lifelong Learning in practice;
- Adult Education Centres are reliable, non-partisan and non-denominational partners who are committed exclusively to the common good;
- Adult Education Centres have high impact and visibility, are present nationwide, enable all citizens more participation in education, employment, culture and public life and thus increase the attractiveness of the city and the region.