

## **Guideline for Businesses: Addressing and Attracting Beginning Students to Internships**

### Preface

Every year approximately 25 % of all students leave institutions of higher education in Germany without a diploma. The reasons for which young people decide to end their studies prematurely can begin with choosing the wrong course of study, continue in excessive pressure to perform, and extend to financial difficulties. They are varied and extensive. For that reason, the termination of a degree programme says nothing about the internal disposition or character of a person. For many Human Resources Officers motivation and personality of the candidate are more important during the job interview than formal qualifications.

In terms of the economy, people who terminate their studies without a degree are potential specialists and managers, as well as future successors in the business. They are older and more mature than people who have just completed their degrees, know what they want (or don't) and likely bring useful knowledge with them from their studies. But it is difficult to reach people who did not complete their degrees because they are not easily identifiable as a group or as individuals.

When people begin a degree programme at an institution of higher education, they are usually recorded in a directory of students. But many institutions of higher education have no system for recording people who are in danger of terminating their studies without earning their degrees. Thus, people who break off their studies are very hard for business organisations such as professional associations and chambers or for businesses to identify and, in light of their ending their studies prematurely, very hard to reach.

But how can businesses best meet this challenge and decide the competition for good, new employees in their own favour? The right method for recruiting good new talent is the deciding factor.

Here are some tips and suggestions for business owners who are looking to reach this target group, people who have broken off their studies without degrees, and to integrate them into the regular operations of the business.

### 1. HOW DO PEOPLE WHO BREAK OFF THEIR STUDIES THINK?

To be able to communicate a convincing opportunity for training to people who have broken off their studies, the company providing the training must be able to empathise with their situation. The difficulties that lead to the decision to break off a degree programme in favour of a trade is accompanied by several personal questions.

- Does ending a course of study constitute a personal failure?
- Am I lacking in perseverance?
- What do my friends and family think of me?
- What will it be like to start a course of training in a vocational school and business with trainees who are considerably younger than I am?
- Would a new boss or my colleagues have any reservations about a "drop-out"?
- What effects will breaking off my studies have on my career?

The feeling of starting all over again after several semesters or even years of study adds to the sense of being under pressure to meet self-imposed deadlines in one's life plan. Thus, it is the task of the company that is providing the training to relativize these concerns and restore the trainee's sense of self-worth by showing



clearly the opportunities for career and professional development that are open. So, it is a good idea to directly address the problems and questions that arise from the decision to terminate a course of studies openly and honestly. The concerns of the company providing the training should play a role.

- Why did the person break off the degree programme?
- Does the person have some kind of learning disability?
- How will he/she interact with younger trainees?
- Can we demand more of him/her than from younger trainees?
- Does his/her performance in the school and the business need to be better than that of other trainees?

The objective is to make it clear to the person who has terminated a degree programme, that neither age nor failure to complete a degree has any impact on the training and then find a suitable course for the training so that both sides can interact amicably. Here it is important to make sure that that business has sufficient time to train in the practical skills and nevertheless, if desired, present the option of shortening the training time.

People who break off their studies expect that the business will do everything it can to create the conditions for good and effective training. This means that even in the case of especially talented trainees are given the opportunity to gain additional qualifications parallel to the completion of their training.

For people who break off their studies, student advisor offices at the institutions of higher education are often the first point of approach. It is therefore worthwhile, to establish contact with these offices and start a cooperative relationship or leave informational materials there stating that people who break off their studies are being recruited.

## 2. HOW CAN ONE MOTIVATE PEOPLE WHO BREAK OFF THEIR STUDIES?

Once people who have broken off their degree programmes have found a business to hire them, the parties must then clarify, what the “drop-outs” can expect from the business and vice-versa. These performances and counter-performances can be both contractually specified (e.g. shortening of the training period) or just dealt with through internal agreements (e.g. no obligation to attend a vocational school or [no] obligation to attend training at the business once the vocational school is completed).

Shortening the training time is often used as an exemplary means of recruiting people who break off their studies for a dual-track training. For many who leave degree programmes it is important, due to the time already lost in a degree programme, to complete the training quickly.

Basically, people who break off their studies early have no legal claim to reduction of training times. If they can document that they have completed their A-levels, however, the business and the trainee can mutually agree to a one-year reduction in training, arranged with the responsible trade chamber.

Credit being given for coursework already completed and/or the opportunity of having the training time shortened due to subject-related course content generally requires an individual examination. With respect to the theoretical content, it can sometimes be difficult for businesses to make a general assessment of what was learned at the institution of higher education. To this end, professional advice should be consulted (e.g. from chambers of commerce, employment services).

But there are more than a few people who break off their studies, who, in the face of the failure, want to learn something from the ground up and for whom a reduction of the time does not enter into consideration. Additionally, the businesses have an interest in training young people to be good specialists and later



management personnel, who will someday be able to manage a business independently, in order to assure that the company can later be transitioned to a new generation of leadership. People who break off their studies must get the message: »You can pursue your personal and professional development alike here«.

### 3. ADVANCEMENT THROUGH ADVANCED QUALIFICATION

Basically, supporting and providing advanced training to employees in a business is an important means of remaining competitive. But for people who have broken off their studies as trainees, support is very valuable. For this reason, many businesses support their trainees through additional instruction.

Financial benefits or benefits-in-kind can also provide an incentive, as can the title “trainee of the month”, to the extent that it is organised at the company level.

Advanced qualifications supplement training with additional content that is not just part of the regular training for the profession. This allows the trainee to gain additional knowledge and skill that is documented by the new qualification. The business can also profit from this knowledge so that, overall, value is increased for both sides. Frequently supplemental qualifications can be wholly or partly credited toward later advanced and continuing training.

### 4. WHAT DO BUSINESSES EXPECT FROM PEOPLE WHO BREAK OFF THEIR STUDIES?

Employing “drop-outs” as trainees can be advantageous. The experience of failure and the resulting re-orientation frequently makes people who have broken off their studies more conscientious and goal-oriented when they are facing the choice of a new career path. Many of them give careful consideration to their next steps, in light of having terminated a course of study, in order to prevent a repeat experience of failure. They are correspondingly more motivated.

This can be a true advantage for the business if the content of the training and the past course of study are similar. To the extent that a person currently being trained as an electrical technician brings knowledge from a degree programme in electrical engineering into the company, this is not just an advantage to the trainee himself, but to the whole company, because that knowledge can be valuable to other employees as well.

Another advantage is that people who break off their studies are available on short notice, that is that it is possible for them to complete an internship at the start of their training. Often this is the best way to determine whether a candidate fits with the business and vice-versa.

In sum, persons who have broken off a degree programme are generally more settled in their personality (depending on their age) and more mature than trainees who are coming directly out of school. This more advanced degree of personal maturity is however no guarantee that a “drop-out” is better suited for a position as a trainee than a person who has just completed school. Working independently is, to be sure, an ability that is constantly demanded in a degree programme, but this fact does not mean that a former student is able to better learn the practical skills of a tradesman than others. Motivation can best be determined through an internship. Based on the greater age and maturity that comes with it, the business providing the training can definitely expect more from people who break off their studies than from those who coming directly from school.

