

Career orientation in the German vocational education and training system: an overview

Vocational
education and
training in Germany



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1. Basics

Definition and goals

- ▶ Career orientation is a process which begins at an early stage in schools and continues through to starting training or taking up an occupation
- ▶ The goal of career orientation is to enable young people to make independent and informed decisions free from stereotyped thinking.
- ▶ It is focussed on nurturing the individual and on continual support for young people.



1. Basics

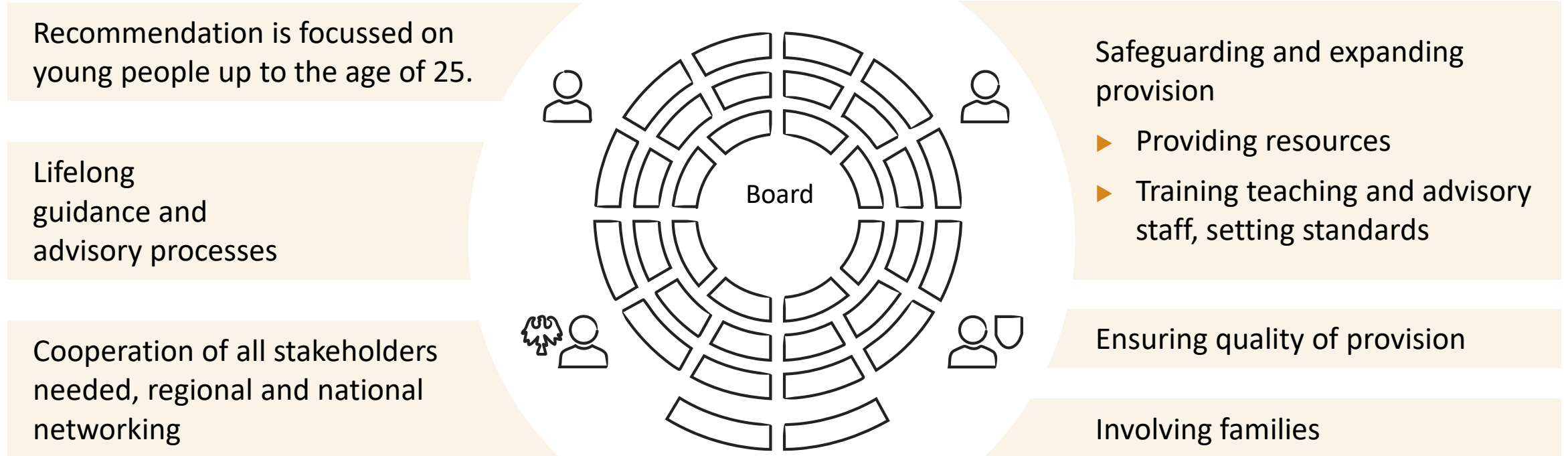
Stakeholders

- ▶ A large number of stakeholders in the areas of education and the labour market are actively involved in career orientation
 - ▶ Schools
 - ▶ Federal states, administrative districts and municipalities
 - ▶ The Employment agency
 - ▶ Federal ministries (in particular the Federal Ministry of Education and Research, BMBF; and the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, BMAS)
 - ▶ Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB)
 - ▶ Chambers, social partners, companies, private providers
 - ▶ ...
- ▶ Coordination: Federal state coordination offices, networks, multiple joint initiatives and activities from local to national level



1. Basics

BIBB board recommendation on career orientation (2005)



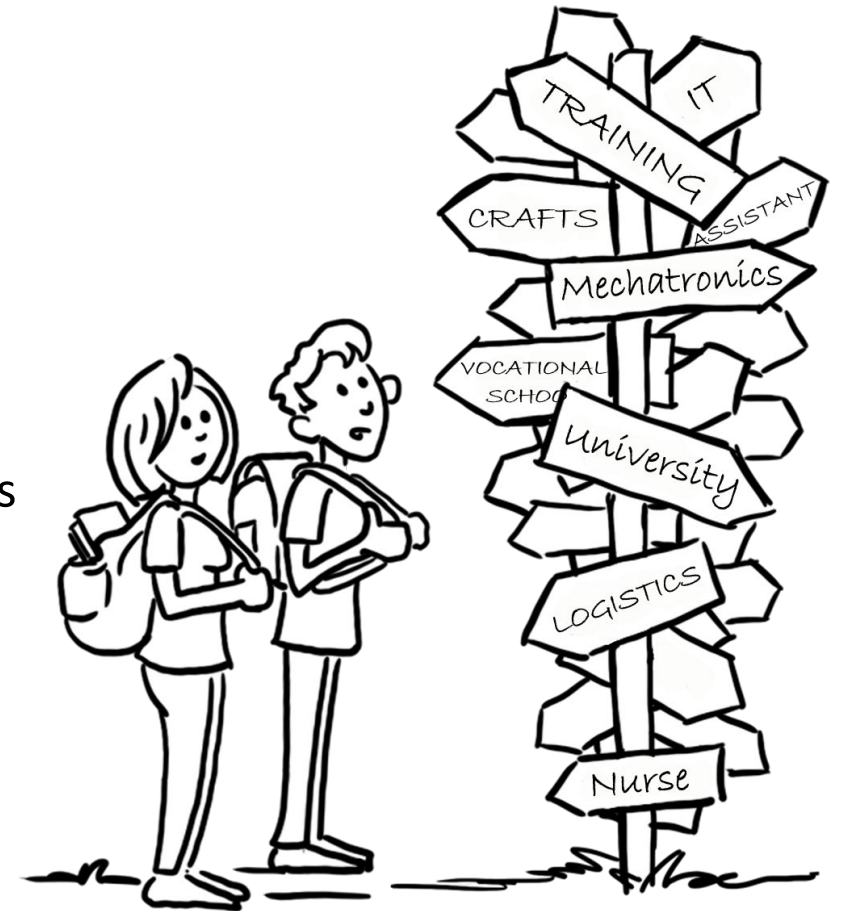
2. Career orientation in schools

- ▶ Responsibility of federal states
- ▶ **Basis:** Recommendation of the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs on vocational orientation in schools
- ▶ Individual policies and regulations of individual federal states
- ▶ Numerous tools used, in some cases in cooperation with other stakeholders such as the Federal Ministry of Education and Research/Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training, companies, chambers and the employment agency



2. Career orientation in schools

- ▶ Starts at ages 13–14, in some federal states ages 11–12 or earlier
- ▶ **Measures:**
 - ▶ Career-choice passport (Berufswahlpass)
 - ▶ Career orientation lessons
 - ▶ Orientation days in companies and work experience placements
 - ▶ Offers e.g. from the employment agency
 - ▶ Vocational orientation programme (BOP) of the BMBF
 - ▶ ...



2. Career orientation in schools

Career-choice passport (Berufswahlpass) and career-choice app (berufswahlapp)



Classroom tool used for over 20 years to support vocational orientation



Developed as part of digitalisation in schools, in use since 2022 in some federal states

- ▶ Joint project of the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) and the federal states
- ▶ The career-choice passport/career-choice app office at BIBB is responsible for and coordinates the career-choice passport, its content development and public relations work across all federal states



2. Career orientation in schools

Career-choice passport (Berufswahlpass) and career-choice app (berufswahlapp)



Contents

- ▶ Documents and provides opportunities for reflection on the career orientation process, e.g. work experience placements and careers guidance interviews.
- ▶ Different task formats to support career orientation
- ▶ Path to career choice: analysis of interests and competencies, evaluation of work experience placements and experience, documentation of the application process
- ▶ Collection of information materials and documents which help pupils when making their career choices
- ▶ Helps with plans for the future



2. Career orientation in schools

Career orientation lessons

- ▶ Often an established part of the curriculum at lower secondary level (from ages 13–14), even earlier in some federal states
- ▶ Provides information about different occupational fields, training opportunities and the labour market.
- ▶ **Objectives:** Encourages self-reflection on own interests and strengths, preparation for choosing a career.



2. Career orientation in schools

Work experience placements (Internships)



Orientation days

Pupil work experience placement

- ▶ This is generally a compulsory placement
- ▶ Ages 13–16, for between one and three weeks
- ▶ Provides practical experience in a business and allows pupils to find out about day-to-day working life.

Voluntary work experience placements

During school holidays, pupils are able to complete additional voluntary work experience placements in order to sample additional occupational fields.

Long-term placements

In some cases, schools and projects also offer longer placements which involve young people working on a regular basis in a business over an extended period.



2. Career orientation in schools

Organisation of work experience placements

Occupational safety

Work experience placements for pupils are subject to the Youth Employment Protection Act (JArbSchG). This regulates, for example, working hours, breaks, and the nature of activities.

Minimum wage

Statutory regulations relating to minimum wage do not apply to pupils on a work experience placement.

Insurance

The school provides accident insurance cover for pupils on work experience placements for the period of the placement. Companies must ensure that they are working in a safe environment.



Supervision

Businesses are required to guide and supervise young people to ensure that the work experience placement is of educational value.

Data protection and protection of personal rights

For placement of pupils under the age of 18, approval from persons with parental authority is generally required (declaration of consent), in particular where personal data is being processed or publications are planned (e.g. photos).



2. Career orientation in schools

Employment agency provision in schools

School visits

Employment agency careers advisers regularly visit schools to offer individual careers guidance interviews.

Careers guidance centre visits

Classes visit the careers guidance centre (Berufsinformationszentrum, BIZ) to find out about occupations, training pathways and opportunities for study.



Materials

Schools use materials developed by the employment agency.

Career choice tests and assessment centre

In cooperation with the employment agency and other providers, schools frequently offer tests and workshops to support career orientation.



2. Career orientation in schools

Vocational orientation programme of the Federal Ministry of Education and Research

Ages 12 to 13

Process

- ▶ Analysis of potential
- ▶ Practice-oriented days in training centres on vocational orientation
- ▶ Reflection and feedback



bibb Bundesinstitut für
Berufsbildung

**Implemented by BIBB with the Chambers
at approximately 3000 schools**

Integrated in regional policies



2. Career orientation in schools

Vocational orientation programme of the Federal Ministry of Education and Research

Analysis of potential:

- ▶ Discovery of social, personal and methodological skills
- ▶ 1–2 days
- ▶ Currently primarily activity-oriented (observed tasks based on assessment centre)



Supporting measures

- ▶ Preparatory discussion
- ▶ Individual feedback

Practical careers guidance days:

- ▶ Exploration of occupational field in inter-company vocational training centres
- ▶ 5–10 days
- ▶ Choice of at least 2 occupational fields



2. Career orientation in schools

Important aspects


- ▶ Preparation, follow-up and discussion of experience on the vocational orientation programme are highly relevant in terms of effectiveness of measures
- ▶ Individual factors are particularly relevant, individualised measures are particularly effective
- ▶ If prepared, career field explorations are effective in terms of self-knowledge and curiosity regarding occupations
- ▶ Reflection and feedback are key in terms of the effectiveness of measures
- ▶ Conversations and perceived support appear to have very positive effects in the career orientation process
- ▶ The effects diminish after 2 to 4 weeks → repeated interventions needed



3. Other stakeholders and programmes

Federal Government spending on various measures in connection with career orientation in 2023

Ministry/authority	Action	Amount in euros
(BMBF)	Measures to improve career orientation	63 million
(BA)	Career orientation measures	76 million
(BA)	Course fees for pre-vocational training measures	187 million
(BA)	Introductory training	17 million
(BA)	Support with transition into the labour market for young people	59 million
Total		402 million



Source: BIBB 2024 Data Report



3. Other stakeholders and programmes

Federal Employment Agency (BA)

- ▶ Career orientation is a statutory duty of the Federal Employment Agency
- ▶ Nationwide offers for all age groups
- ▶ Advisor network
- ▶ Events in schools, in the employment agency or in other locations
- ▶ Advice offers, individual careers guidance interviews
- ▶ Careers guidance centres throughout Germany
- ▶ Information materials: print, online, some interactive
- ▶ Networking with other stakeholders



**Bundesagentur
für Arbeit**



3. Other stakeholders and programmes

Chambers

- ▶ Print and online products, information events
- ▶ Advice
- ▶ Apprenticeship exchange (online platforms)
- ▶ Training fairs and matching events
- ▶ Arrangement of work experience placements
- ▶ Working with schools
 - ▶ Career information days
 - ▶ Company visits
 - ▶ Workshops
- ▶ National information and image campaigns



3. Other stakeholders and programmes

Trade unions

- ▶ Partners for schools
 - ▶ Projects
 - ▶ Teaching and learning provision
 - ▶ Materials
- ▶ Information offers, advice for young people
- ▶ Seminar offers for disseminators
- ▶ Political support, e.g. using surveys of young people, statements, etc.



3. Other stakeholders and programmes

Regional coordination offices

- ▶ Run by the federal states, often at the local level (administrative district, municipality)
 - ▶ Implementation of federal state policies with a regional perspective
- ▶ Coordination and participation of all local stakeholders (schools, chambers, trade unions, companies, etc.)
- ▶ Services for all stakeholders
- ▶ Create transparency
- ▶ Organisation of events, e.g. coordinated exploration of vocational fields, course of study orientation days, dual training days, etc.



3. Other stakeholders and programmes

The Education Chains Initiative

- ▶ The Education Chains initiative supports young people in completing their school leaving certificate, finding a training position and obtaining their professional qualification.
- ▶ Developed by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) in conjunction with the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (BMAS), the Federal Employment Agency (BA) and the federal states
- ▶ **Objective:** Seamless transition from school into training and work
- ▶ **Elements of education chains:**
 - ▶ Vocational orientation: support with making career choices and with pre-vocational training while at school
 - ▶ Transitional sector: preparatory measures and support offers between school and training, e.g. support with transition into the labour market, ASAflex (Assistierte Ausbildung flexibel [flexible assisted training]), Career Orientation for People from Refugee and Migrant Backgrounds (BOFplus)
 - ▶ Training support: Individual support during training to improve training success and to avoid drop-outs (e.g. VerAplus coaching programme for improving training outcomes)

Bildungsketten 



3. Other stakeholders and programmes

Regional coordination offices

- ▶ Launch of the initiative “Graduation and continuation – Education chains up to the vocational training qualification” in 2010 by the BMBF
- ▶ Central cooperation model of the federal government (BMBF, BMAS), the Federal Employment Agency and the federal states
- ▶ Coordination of funding measures and targets for providing continuous support and a chain of funding from school through to successful completion of the training qualification
- ▶ **Governance**
 - ▶ Agreements between the federal government, the federal states and the Federal Employment Agency
 - ▶ Federal Government-Federal State-Federal Employment Agency Support Group
 - ▶ Specialist support: Education Chains service office at BIBB

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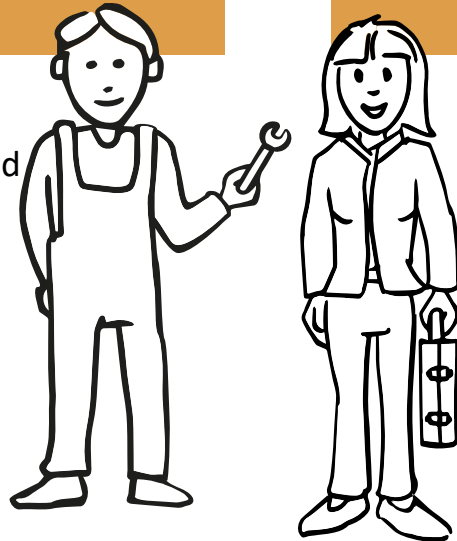
3. Other stakeholders and programmes

Girls' Day and Boys' Day

Top 10 dual training occupations based on new contracts in 2025

Men

1. Motor vehicle mechatronics technician
2. Plant mechanic for sanitary, heating and air conditioning systems
3. Electronics technician
4. Information technology specialist
5. Retail services clerk
6. Industrial mechanic
7. Sales assistant for retail services
8. Mechatronics fitter
9. Warehouse logistics operator
10. Electronics technician for industrial engineering



Women

1. Medical assistant
2. Qualified dental employee
3. Office manager
4. Retail services clerk
5. Industrial clerk
6. Sales assistant for retail services
7. Clerk in public administration
8. Hairdresser
9. Bank clerk
10. Tax clerk

38% of all new contracts signed by men

52% of all new contracts signed by women



3. Other stakeholders and programmes

Girls' Day

- ▶ National action day
- ▶ Provides young girls (from age 11) with the opportunity to find out about traditionally male-dominated occupational fields (< 40% women)
- ▶ e.g. occupations in the areas of engineering, IT, the skilled trades and science
- ▶ **Programme for the day:**
 - ▶ **Business visits:** Girls visit companies, research centres, universities and institutions to gain an insight into day-to-day working life.
 - ▶ **Workshops and hands-on activities:** Practical activities allow participants to get involved themselves and to test out their skills in the occupations presented
 - ▶ **Information events:** Experts provide information on career pathways, training opportunities and future prospects in STEM occupations (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics).
- ▶ **Stakeholders:** Network comprising federal government, federal states, business, unions
 - All companies and institutions with a registered office in Germany can participate, see [Girls' Day](https://www.girls-day.de) (girls-day.de)



3. Other stakeholders and programmes

Boys' Day

- ▶ National action day
- ▶ Provides young boys (from age 11) with the opportunity to find out about traditionally female-dominated occupational fields (< 40% men)
- ▶ e.g. occupations in the areas of nursing, education, health and social affairs.
- ▶ **Programme for the day:**
 - ▶ **Business visits:** Boys visit organisations such as nursery schools, care homes, hospitals and social institutions to gain an insight into day-to-day working life.
 - ▶ **Workshops and hands-on activities:** Practical activities allow participants to gain experience themselves and to test out their skills in the occupations presented.
 - ▶ **Information events:** Experts provide information on career pathways, training opportunities and future prospects in social and educational occupations.
- ▶ **Stakeholders:** Network comprising federal government, federal states, business, unions
 - All companies and institutions with a registered office in Germany can participate, see [Boys' Day](http://boys-day.de) (boys-day.de)



4. Benefits of career orientation



Benefits for young people

Early direction setting: early recognition of interests and strengths.

Preventing the wrong decisions: clear career goals reduce training drop-outs.

Targeted planning: aligning of training or degree to career goals.

Motivation and confidence: a clear career goal increases motivation for learning and confidence.

Benefits for companies

Tailored selection: companies benefit from applicants who are prepared and who have clear ideas about their career.

Less labour turnover: well informed trainees and employees remain with the company for longer.

Social benefits

Reduction in youth unemployment: targeted career orientation eases the transition into the labour market.

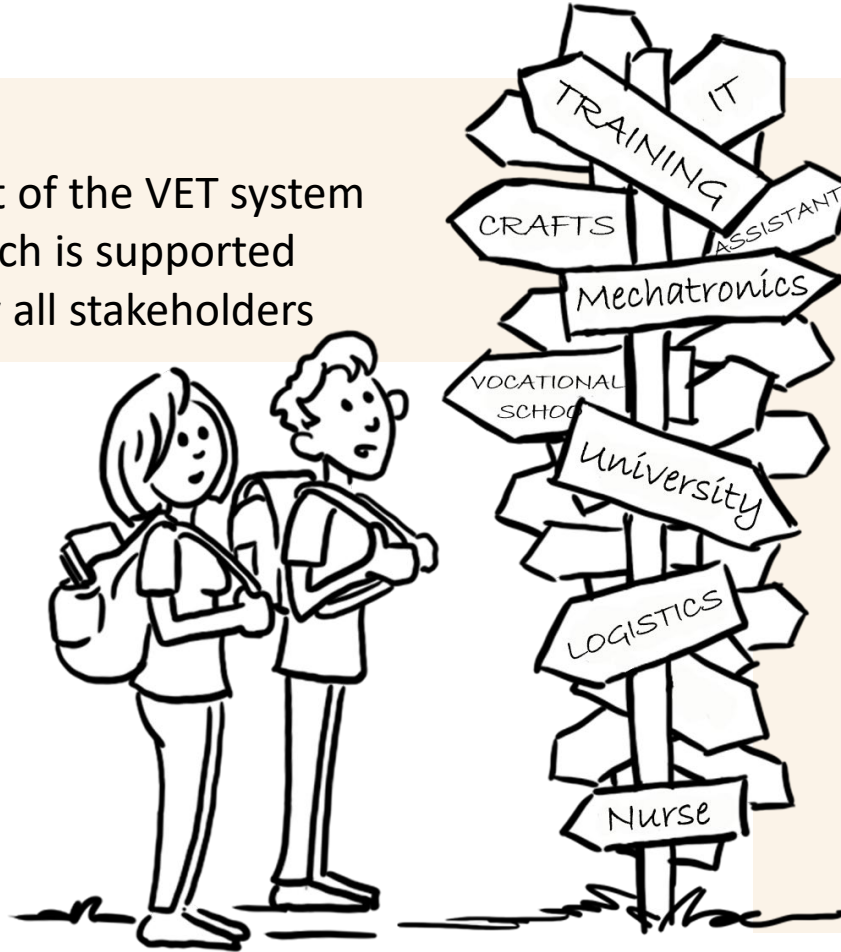
Economic success: a young person having received good guidance contributes over the long term to economic stability and to innovation.



5. Summary/principles

Career orientation

- ▶ An essential part of the VET system in Germany which is supported and financed by all stakeholders



Principles of good career orientation

- ▶ Establish networks
- ▶ Coordination of and cooperation from all stakeholders
- ▶ Ensure ongoing orientation (from primary level through to the school leaving certificate and beyond)
- ▶ Include involvement of young people, facilitate individual support
- ▶ Process of reflection for young people is key
- ▶ Remove gender stereotypes
- ▶ Peer learning
- ▶ Train the teachers



Further information



berufenavi.de – Looking for vocational orientation?



[Career-choice app \(Berufswahlapp\)](#)



[Career-choice passport \(Berufswahlpass\)](#)



[zynd](#)



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