

## Full steam ahead towards the future - anchoring future skills at all levels in adult education centers



(c) DVV Future Skills Fachübergreifende Konferenz 2025 26. und 27. Mai 2025 im Volkshaus Jena

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#### Why it worth to engage with Future Skills - a thematic introduction through the German vhs family



As the largest provider of adult education and continuing education, the 838 adult education centres are present throughout Germany and create regional learning landscapes that reach more than 6 million people every year with a wide range of content and formats. The declared aim of the interdisciplinary conference was to create a format in which interdisciplinary topics can be discussed and ideas developed together.

It is extremely important for adult education centres, whose work fulfils a public education mandate, to constantly pick up on current

developments. 'Transformation is the central element of today,' emphasised Gundula Frieling. As Head of National Projects at DVV, she reported that general adult education is particularly relevant in this context. After all, adult education centres have always taught interdisciplinary skills as part of their broad portfolio. What is new, however, is that the transformation is always taking place quickly and at different levels.

This is also supported by the fact that more than 40% of adult education centres have AZAV certification and are therefore allowed to implement measures on behalf of the Federal Employment Agency. However, this area of education is not yet sufficiently recognised externally and Gundula Frieling encouraged the participants to focus the profile of their adult education centre even more strongly on this subject area. The various certificate programmes from the Xpert series<sup>2</sup>, presented by Dr Tobias Diemer, Director of the Baden-Württemberg Adult Education Association, could also be helpful in this context. These specifically address various future skills and can be used both in courses and in labour market-related measures.

Susanne Deß and Winfried Krüger, both deputy chairpersons of DVV, set a special accent at the beginning of the second day of the conference on 27 May 2025, which is also German Diversity Day. It

is no secret that Adult Education Centres stand for diversity and democracy. What is new, however, is that the DVV had recently signed the Diversity Declaration in order to convey this attitude even more strongly than before. At the same time, both emphasised that this decision had been preceded by a lengthy process of consideration. After all, the Diversity Charter was developed in the context of commercial enterprises. However, Winfried Krüger emphasised: 'This initiative is a reflection of civil society.' And Susanne Deß added: 'Why shouldn't we as adult education centres also learn from all the other players?' Manjiri Palicha, Chair of the Diversity Committee of the DVV, then joined in with a digital greeting, and she once again highlighted the important role adult education centres play in bringing the diverse population in Germany into contact and exchange and opening up opportunities and prospects, especially for marginalised groups.

### **The relevance of adult education centres and future skills - greetings**

Dr Thomas Nitzsche also emphasised that adult education centres are important partners in the development of future skills in the German population. As Lord Mayor of the City of Jena, he took a differentiated view of the topic, as the interdisciplinary future skills are often not tangible, but are developed in very different settings and formats. He particularly emphasised the democratic competence at this point. His appeal was: 'Education needs to move away from compartmentalisation, we all need to work much more interprofessionally!' The city of Jena is also characterised by interdisciplinarity. At the end of the 19th



century, the three historically influential personalities of the city, the entrepreneur Carl Zeiss, the physicist and social reformer Ernst Abbe and the glass chemist Otto Schott, pooled their expertise and laid the foundations for the city's economic development. The venue - the Volkshaus Jena as an 'old lady that has been carefully modernised', as Dr Thomas Nitzsche described - also originated from this interdisciplinary cooperation and was also able to develop this inspiring atmosphere as part of the FÜK.



Berthold Hübers, Head of the NA at the BiBB, outlined how important the European view of adult education is. This is because many education topics can be found throughout Europe and are not limited to individual countries. This was shown, for example, in the European Union's government paper entitled 'The Union of Skills', which could also provide valuable impetus for the content-related work of adult education centres. In order to strengthen European exchange and promote joint learning, the Erasmus+ programme offers various opportunities to further develop one's own organisation and to open up

attractive further training opportunities for staff. The Europass provides structured evidence of competences - both for participants and for further education staff - and the EPAL platform opens up spaces for exchange and specialist information as an online community for adult education. In particular, Berthold Hübers emphasised the European Agenda on Adult Learning, which aims to bring together adult education stakeholders and thereby build strong networks - and he invited the adult education centres to also get involved as part of the wide range of events on offer and to fill the European education area with life.

The Thuringian Minister of Education, Christian Tischner, was particularly enthusiastic. For him, 'continuing education is not a luxury, but the backbone of democracy', which is particularly important in view of current political developments and the increasing drift to the right. Adult education centres, as the largest providers of continuing education, fulfil an enormous social mission here, as they reach people and provide them with space for personal and professional development. This applies in particular to the increasingly important future skills that promote innovation, communication, creativity and critical thinking. 'Adult education centres make change possible with their work,' said Education Minister Christian Tischner.

#### Four keynote speeches with different orientations - different perspectives on future skills

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What exactly are future skills? This rather broad term can be described and visualised in different ways, so that there are various models. One model, namely the Future Skills Navigator, was presented at by economist and innovation researcher Dr Martin Schwemmler. A total of four skill areas (Rational, Emotional, Spiritual, Transformational) were coupled with four levels of action (I, You, We, All) in order to visualise how multi-layered future skills are. The model is based on the assumption that we now live in a VUCA world characterised by volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity. In order to be able to train the necessary future skills, holistic education is needed that enables a change in attitude towards a growth mindset, focusses on the development of everyone's potential and opens up a systemic view of the world.

'Overall, we need a bit more jazz, i.e. room for improvisation and self-efficacy,' said Dr Martin Schwemmler, summarising the skills that will be particularly required in future. In this sense, he associates adult education centres with: Vision; Houses of Future Learning; Skills for Future Shapers.



Adult education researcher Prof. Dr Annika Goeze conveyed her many years of enthusiasm for the adult education centre institution in her keynote speech which focused on the future role of staff at adult education centres. 'The adult education centre system stands and falls with its employees!' she summarised the value of vhs' greatest resource. After all, the countless dedicated people who work full-time and part-time at ensure that adult education centres can carry out their work reliably and, from a political perspective, generally silently, even in times of social crisis. To ensure that this remains the case in the future, there is a need of staff with digital expertise as well as future and organisational skills. A particular focus here was on the programme booklet, which determines the timing of the traditional work processes of an adult education centre.



On the second day of the conference, educational researcher Prof Dr Alisha Heinemann made a fiery appeal to the participants of the FÜK to be more capable of utopia. In a time characterised by multiple crises, it is particularly important to dream dreams of a better world. This must be done both on a cognitive level and on an emotional level. The role of adult education in society as a whole is increasing in this context. It is the task of managers to anchor this utopian ability in their institutions, while it is the task of educational staff to open up spaces for utopian ability for the diverse participants. 'Adult education centres are multi-layered places of education!' outlined Prof. Dr Alisha Heinemann. Using concrete examples from various adult education centres, she illustrated how people from outside the institution can also find access to adult education centres. This could be achieved, for example, through the creation of community centres, by bringing together different population groups in educational formats or through more visible diversity in social media.

### **Brief impulse and panel discussion – future skills and how to tackle them in practice**



Larissa Klemme from of the Bertelsmann Stiftung answered the question of which future skills are particularly relevant for companies in a brief keynote speech. She presented the Job Monitor portal, which can be used to determine which skills are in demand in which region and to what extent. The basis for this is the comprehensive analysis of job advertisements. This allows regional requirements and their development over the course of time to be clearly visualised. In particular, the regional structure of is a good opportunity for the local adult education centres to adapt their educational offerings accordingly.

In the subsequent panel discussion, André Vogel, Director of vhs Hofer Land, and Danijel Dejanović, Director of vhs Frankfurt, provided insights into their work. Both emphasised the importance of networking and building relationships in order to reach local companies. The implementation then varied from region to region: in the Hofer Land region, further education initiators<sup>15</sup> were deployed, while in the city of Frankfurt am Main walking structures were trained to reach people in their

everyday environment. A linguistic adaptation was also necessary, as the term Future Skills was far too vague to attract participants.

### **Learning together - a look at the reflection sessions and workshops**

The adult education centres themselves are as diverse as the people in the educational formats at

vhs: large or small; as part of the local authority, limited company or registered association; urban or rural in character. In addition to the various welcoming speeches and impulses, which focussed on different facets of Future Skills, reflection sessions and workshops opened up spaces for exchange for the participants, in which specific aspects could be deepened and discussed



The total of 12 reflection sessions on the first day of the conference each focussed on an aspect of Future Skills relevant to the vhs. These included, for example, the question of how future skills can also be implemented in formats in rural areas, what a vhs centre of the future could look like in concrete terms or how the vhs can dare to be more European. Because there is also great potential here as a municipal educational institution! One concrete idea mentioned was job shadowing in a language school, for example, in order to gain impetus for the foreign languages department. A look at Scandinavia could help to sound out the possibilities and limits of digitalisation or to explore third learning locations. In addition to content-related topics, Europe-wide training programmes could also strengthen intercultural skills

It became clear that looking beyond the European horizon can help to reflect on one's own work from a different perspective.



On the second day of the conference, 13 workshops were offered, each of which focussed on further topics with expert input from. These included, for example, democracy education, basic education, the use of AI and many other aspects in the context of Future Skills. The chosen formats were dependent on the topic; there were both presentations and interactive offerings in which the participants eagerly discussed and reflected.

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