

# 1 Introduction

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This chapter situates the review in the context of the state of Brandenburg within the Federal Republic of Germany. It explains the rationale behind the review, outlining the collaborative relationship between the OECD, the European Commission, and the state government. It lays out the organisation of the review, highlighting the themes of subsequent chapters. Finally, the chapter offers an extensive summary of findings and recommendations.

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## Context of the review

Brandenburg is one of 16 states of the Federal Republic of Germany, bordering Poland in the east, surrounding the federal state of Berlin and bordering the states of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern (in the north), Saxony (in the south) and Saxony-Anhalt (in the west). Brandenburg is one of the former East German states (the new *Länder*). The state capital, Potsdam, borders Berlin to the southwest.

The proximity of Brandenburg to the federal capital is both an asset and a liability. On the positive side, the state provides a home for firms, entrepreneurs and professionals who wish to share in the economic strength of Berlin, while avoiding some of the costs of locating in the federal capital. On the negative side, Berlin acts as a magnet for the talent that Brandenburg has grown, leading to the outward migration of higher education students and skilled professionals. The challenge for Brandenburg is to capitalise on the asset, while creating an environment that encourages homegrown skills to remain in the state.

Brandenburg's population of 2.5 million, which represents 3% of the total German population, is forecast to fall over the next two decades. Brandenburg already has one of the oldest populations among the German states and the average age is forecast to grow even older. These demographic shifts have implications for the skill profile of the population and, hence, for the region's labour market.

At the same time, Brandenburg's economy is undergoing structural change, which opens exciting new prospects for highly skilled workers: The state has intensified efforts to diversify the economy towards cleaner and more knowledge-intensive industries, including the development of advanced manufacturing, spill-over effects from the start-up scene in Berlin, fostering entrepreneurial activities at its own higher education institutions, promoting innovative places for working and living, and the programmed closure of coal production and its replacement with next-generation technologies.

As the engine of skills development and research, the higher education system will play an important role in helping the state unleash economic opportunities and overcome its skills challenges.

## This report

This review aims to support the authorities and HEIs of the state of Brandenburg in improving education outcomes and skills levels of the state's young people, and in reskilling and upskilling mature learners, which ultimately aims to promote economic development and social inclusion in the state. Key authorities involved include the Ministry of Science, Research and Culture (*Ministerium für Wissenschaft, Forschung und Kultur (MWFK)*) of Brandenburg.

The OECD was asked to conduct analyses, collect good practice examples from other jurisdictions and countries, and provide recommendations to support MWFK in developing a new state strategy on higher education. This would better align the higher education offer to current and future needs of the state economy. For this purpose, the OECD:

- analysed and diagnosed the policy landscape related to higher education and skills development, access paths into higher education, student profiles and graduate trajectories in the state of Brandenburg, using a wide range of available documents, comparable international data and German-specific micro-level data;
- analysed and selected international and national examples of good practice to underpin the review's recommendations for action to public authorities, HEIs and other relevant stakeholders such as schools and businesses in Brandenburg;
- consulted via video conferences relevant stakeholders from Brandenburg – public agencies, HEIs, students, schools and businesses – to gain a better understanding of the project context and discuss pointers for action.

The review was part of the project “Analysis and advice for a renewed tertiary education strategy for Brandenburg and guidance on categorisation of scientific continuing education”, funded by the European Union through the Structural Reform Support Programme. It was conducted in close collaboration with MWFK, the state’s HEIs and the Directorate-General for Structural Reform Support of the European Commission.

The process resulted in this report, which Brandenburg authorities and HEIs will use to develop an updated, coherent and effective policy framework for higher education in the state. This will serve as the basis for a new higher education strategy.

- **Chapter 2** sets the context of the review for the higher education system in Brandenburg, and examines the *economic and demographic challenges* facing Brandenburg, describing the demographic trends and how the economy is expected to change. As coal mining is phased out and knowledge-based industries (like advanced manufacturing and health) assume greater importance in the state’s economy, the skill needs in the labour market will continue to evolve. That change will have important implications for the state’s higher education system. The chapter also sets out how the higher education system can contribute to the opportunities for further economic development in the state.
- **Chapter 3** looks at the *organisation of the higher education system*, including the legislation that determines how the system is governed, the state government’s arrangements for the steering and the funding of the system and the institutions’ governance and management approaches. The chapter also lays out the types of programmes offered and identifies issues the system must overcome.
- **Chapter 4** discusses the *performance of the Brandenburg higher education system* in ensuring *access* for young people. It focuses on the transition from secondary schools to higher education, career and study advice and orientation for secondary students, and the trend among Brandenburg’s school leavers to take up higher education. It explores the decision making of school leavers and sets out factors that influence the choice of study destination.
- **Chapter 5** looks at the *performance of students in Brandenburg’s higher education systems*, and discusses the profile of the student population, including its international component. It looks at success measures for students in the system – in particular, completion rates and the time taken to complete a qualification – and compares them with systems in other German states. The system of student financial aid that supports higher education students is also examined.
- **Chapter 6** looks at the performance of the Brandenburg higher education system in delivering *labour market outcomes* for its graduates; its graduates have high employment rates compared with those from other regions but that many find their careers outside the state. This chapter also looks at how Brandenburg’s success in enrolling and graduating international students could help fill skill gaps in the state’s labour market.
- **Chapter 7** sets out the government’s strategies and policies on higher education and discusses how the higher education system might shape the government’s skills strategy.

Chapters 2 to 7 undertake a situational analysis, describing arrangements and trends, then assess performance, looking at approaches to similar challenges from other OECD countries. Chapters 3 to 7 also give pointers for how Brandenburg’s higher education system might address these challenges in the future.

## Summary of the findings

Brandenburg’s higher education sector is developing a strong human capital and research base for the state’s economy. This involves offering specialties that provide skills for the labour market; attracting international students, especially in the area of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM);

and making studies more attractive both through greater support for students and more flexibility. These strengths are highlighted below:

- The teaching and research profiles of Brandenburg's eight public HEIs are complementary. Each HEI has specialties that perform especially well and that have gained a reputation for excellence. As a result, Brandenburg's higher education graduates enjoy comparatively strong employment outcomes at entry into the labour market in the state and beyond.
- HEIs have attracted a growing number of international students to programmes in demand by the state labour market, particularly in STEM and business fields. These students have strong potential to contribute to economic development of the state upon graduation.
- HEIs are laying the groundwork for greater success for students through better guidance and support systems, and more flexibility. They have introduced more orientation programmes to support completion of studies, and students appear to be making relatively good use of them. They have also become more flexible, allowing students with less conventional schooling background and people who are working to participate in higher education.
- The state government is also making efforts to attract students and meet their needs more effectively. The ministry responsible for higher education, *Ministerium für Wissenschaft, Forschung und Kultur* (MWFK) has established two structures that play a prominent role in attracting students to Brandenburg's HEIs. *Netzwerk Studienorientierung* (Study Orientation Network) – an independent association of the eight public HEIs – is the largest provider of career and study guidance in Brandenburg. With offices at each HEI and coverage of all in-state schools, it organises about 1 000 events per year; many events have become virtual since COVID-19-related closures. *Präsenzstellen* bring HEIs closer to prospective students and companies in remote areas of Brandenburg.
- Improving education opportunities in STEM has been high on both governmental and HEI agendas, especially for engineering which is in great demand in Brandenburg. To become more attractive to students and better connected to the economy, Brandenburg's technical HEIs have restructured their study offer and refocused their research. In addition, dual study programmes, combining academic studies with work experience in a company and vocational training, are increasingly offered. They appear to be a promising way of attracting more youth to higher education and retaining a skilled workforce in Brandenburg's business sector.

Despite its many strengths, Brandenburg's higher education sector also faces challenges. These range from projections of declining enrolment and low participation of youth to financial issues affecting both students and the institutions themselves. These challenges are highlighted below:

- The state population is forecast both to fall and age over the next two decades, which would inevitably translate into lower enrolment in higher education.
- Direct transition from secondary school to higher education in Brandenburg is the lowest among all German states. Of those who left Brandenburg schools with a qualification to enter higher education, only two-thirds made the transition.
- Several factors hinder participation of Brandenburg's youth in higher education. The perceived high costs of higher education and returns of vocational education and training deter students, especially girls and disadvantaged students, from entering higher education. Relatively low expectations of Brandenburg's school leavers and their parents for students to complete higher education pose another barrier. Finally, distance to regional HEIs due both to the largely rural character of the state and the locations of institutions creates an obstacle to higher education.
- The perceived high costs of higher education in Brandenburg are aggravated by several factors. First, schools do not offer enough guidance about financial options for studies. In addition, many schools are not using their right to nominate prospective students to the *Studienstiftung des deutschen Volkes* (German National Merit Foundation).

- The Federal Training Assistance Act (*BAföG*) is rigid, hindering both participation and completion of higher education in Brandenburg. In-state students are older and take longer to complete their studies than elsewhere in Germany, which decreases their eligibility for federal financial assistance. Students from low socio-economic backgrounds are in an especially difficult position: 41% of these students in Brandenburg (versus only 16% in Germany) do not qualify for *BAföG*, because they have been enrolled longer than the regular study time of their programme.
- Uncertainty about funding options for the eight public HEIs limits their offer of continuing education and training.
- Several state ministries are involved in skills development, but their efforts are not fully aligned. A high-performing higher education system helps develop the skills and build the research and innovation capacity needed for a more knowledge-intensive economy in the state. However, strategies for skills and economic development contain limited reference to higher education.

## Summary of the recommendations

### Ensure the system offers a broad range of qualifications and encourage re-/upskilling

#### Diversity and excellence

- Maintain the system of institutional specialisation and invest in areas of excellence through the framework contracts with HEIs underpinned by continuous dialogue between the rectors' conference, MWFK, other government agencies and employer groups.
- Advertise areas of excellence extensively, including via online marketing, to draw the interest of prospective students and leading researchers, further lift the performance of those research groups and encourage the exploration of opportunities for knowledge transfer.

#### Study offerings, pathways and accreditation

- Ensure that programme delivery is structured (e.g. offering hybrid teaching and using blended learning) and timetabled (e.g. with evening tutorials) to reduce disadvantages for part-time enrolment and to increase the compatibility of study schedules with work. This would respond to the projected increase in demand for upskilling and reskilling among working adults and the reality that many students discontinue their studies to pursue employment or for financial reasons.
- Investigate mechanisms for improving access to study programmes, including bachelor's degrees to be studied in parallel with full-time employment.
- Review the structure of continuing education and training (CET) programmes, considering new developments such as the advent of micro-credentials.
- Review the processes for initial programme approval and accreditation, balancing the need for high standards of integrity and credibility (through assessment of the quality of programme design and institutional capability) with the need to be responsive to the needs of employers and industry groups. Introduce better systems of follow-up audits of approved programmes, (such as checking the performance of new programmes in attracting enrolments, producing graduates, delivering good outcomes for graduates and meeting employer/industry needs).

### Public funding for HEIs

- Secure available funding and infrastructure for dual study programmes.
- Secure funding for bachelor's degree programmes, which can be studied in parallel with full-time employment
- Review options for CET, recognising the importance of compliance with European Union rules on state aid.

### Financial assistance for participation in CET

- Monitor the effectiveness of federal financial assistance to participants in CET; potentially reintroduce a state-specific measure to provide targeted support for uptake of CET at HEIs (similar to the recently discontinued support measure *Bildungsscheck*).

## Ensure prospective students have structured information to make informed choices and ensure strong study orientation support

### Study and career orientation at schools

- Study and career orientation at schools should be comprehensive and include i) information about study and career paths and programme options; ii) information about financing options for the various education pathways, including higher education and vocational education and training (VET), and non-financial support mechanisms available to students; and iii) individual counselling for students and parents. Career orientation should be appropriately funded across all public schools and peer learning should be encouraged among all schools – public and private.
- Brandenburg's schools should more actively use their right to nominate gifted school students for scholarships of excellence offered by *Studienstiftung des deutschen Volkes* (German National Merit Foundation) and provide better information and support for scholarship applications.

### Study and career orientation at HEIs

- MWFK should ensure sustainable funding for the (currently temporary) structures of study and career orientation at HEIs, particularly *Netzwerk Studienorientierung* (Study Orientation Network) and *Präsenzstellen* (presence centres) and consider extending the mandate of *Präsenzstellen* to also use them as study sites.
- HEIs should continue to reach out to schools, including vocational schools, via *Netzwerk Studienorientierung* and *Präsenzstellen* and offer individual guidance and peer support, particularly to disadvantaged school students.
- MWFK and *Ministerium für Bildung, Jugend und Sport – MBS* (Ministry for Education, Youth and Sports) should take steps to introduce a student-mentorship programme between school students and HEI students, particularly for disadvantaged students.

### HEI digital marketing

- HEIs and *Netzwerk Studienorientierung* should maintain the recently developed digital information and counselling offer and continue to invest in digital marketing and to leverage social media platforms, as this is where they increasingly meet (prospective) students.

- HEIs should consider employing student ambassadors to manage social media channels, informing about life on campus and engaging alumni in student recruitment.

### **Career orientation information and tools**

- MWFK should advocate among German states and also with the federal government for career advice tools that integrate all forms of relevant data, and for a one-stop national career and study guidance website that would provide impartial, objective and factual information in a structured way and that would give access to interactive tools to aid the decision-making process, ensuring:
  - that the site is designed to help young people, their families and advisers by reducing uncertainties (for instance, about labour market needs), by providing tools that help them clarify their career and study interests, and by helping them navigate the myriad study and career options and their funding;
  - that the website explains the benefits of lifelong learning and provides information and tools to help mature learners and workers who are seeking help to deepen their skills or to shift their career trajectories.
- The state government should maintain and expand the use of tailored information channels to target learners in Brandenburg (and other German states, notably, neighbouring Berlin), with the two Brandenburg advisory websites *studieren-in-brandenburg.de* and *fachkraefteportal-brandenburg.de* via social media, targeted online ads, billboard ads, etc.
- *Netzwerk Studienorientierung* should regularly update the *studieren-in-brandenburg.de* website, which is already well structured, to include new useful features and relevant information.

## **Increase student preparedness for higher education and ensure students complete their study programmes**

### **Study offerings**

- Maintain opportunities for students – especially those who are working – to tailor their studies to their learning preferences by, for instance, offering more flexibility in teaching and learning formats (particularly building on the pandemic experience to offer more teaching in hybrid models, which combine virtual and in-person classes, and to use blended learning).

### **Non-financial support and information**

- Enhance peer support programmes at HEIs to provide individual advice to disadvantaged students during their studies and help them develop a network at the HEI.
- Take steps to increase the visibility of the information and counselling offer at HEIs and consider potentially offering these services from a single office.
- Provide information to students about life on campus and in the city where HEI sites are located to motivate some to relocate.
- Use the framework contracts with HEIs to collect data on student engagement, such as academic challenge, learning with peers, teaching methods, and experiences with faculty. A survey on student engagement could be managed state-wide by MWFK, with the results provided to HEIs to feed into their quality improvement work.
- Monitor the *College* programmes in place.



### Financial support

- The Brandenburg state government (and MWFK in particular) should advocate for a comprehensive, principle-based review of student financial aid systems, in particular to assess alignment of the federal assistance for continuing education and training (*Aufstiegsfortbildungsförderungsgesetz, AFBG*) and the *BAföG* schemes in light of the newly adopted Federal Strategy for Lifelong Learning, and to ensure that rules for their use are transparent, and that application procedures are user-friendly and efficient.

### Public funding to HEIs

- Consider including an indicator related to student study progression rates (such as the number of “examination-active students” based on obtained European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System credits, for example) or qualification completion rates along with the number of graduates in the performance funding model.
- Assess the institutional funding model to ensure it appropriately increases in line with student numbers, enabling HEIs to maintain capability and quality as they grow (e.g. through hiring new teaching staff with increasing student numbers).

## Enhance practice-oriented learning and entrepreneurship in the system and optimise framework conditions for internationalisation of the system

### Practice-oriented learning

- *Ministerium für Wirtschaft, Arbeit und Energie – MWAE* (Ministry of Economic Affairs of Brandenburg) should ensure the continuation of the “Innovation Expert” support programme for both graduate and working student employment.
- The state government sector should establish more practice-oriented learning opportunities for higher education students, including voluntary paid internships.
- The Chambers of Commerce and Industry and *Wirtschaftsförderung Brandenburg GmbH* (Economic Development Agency Brandenburg) should continue to actively promote co-operation between small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) so they can share administrative expenses and work collectively with HEIs to increase (joint) offers of internships, and research projects, and bring SMEs and HEIs together.

### Entrepreneurial activities and transfer of knowledge and technology

- Maintain HEIs’ capacity to provide tailored advice and consulting to local SMEs via transfer offices and *Präsenzstellen*.
- Enhance financial support for HEIs’ entrepreneurial activities via the transfer strategy. Consider introduction of an explicit performance indicator with regard to entrepreneurial activities in the funding model.
- Support joint initiatives of HEIs and local stakeholders to promote entrepreneurial activities through the state innovation strategy and regional economic structures, such as the clusters.
- Maintain the *PerspektivWechsel* programme and provide matching opportunities to more researcher-entrepreneur couples per year state-wide if possible.



### Improve the conditions for internationalisation

- Work towards establishing and maintaining a welcoming culture and anti-discriminatory social climate across the broader state government, within the school and higher education systems. Ensure that anti-discrimination officers at HEIs are given sufficient resources and authority to issue complaints and sanctions.
- Encourage HEIs, Chambers of Commerce and *Wirtschaftsförderung Brandenburg GmbH* (Economic Development Agency Brandenburg) to collaborate with the aim to connect international students to local employers via internships and other forms of practice-oriented learning.
- Assess whether the funding model and institutional framework contracts are effective in promoting outward student mobility. Encourage HEIs and particularly universities of applied sciences, through the framework contracts, to integrate intercultural and international knowledge and skills into the curriculum, including foreign language skills for domestic students.
- Develop ambitious research projects; offer guidance on potential visa sponsorships; provide clear information related to the potential relocation package and career prospects; create detailed job descriptions that spark a candidate's interest, despite the location; offer training in language, communication, teaching and management skills; and advertise the offer among the right scientific audience to help Brandenburg's HEIs attract top international researchers.

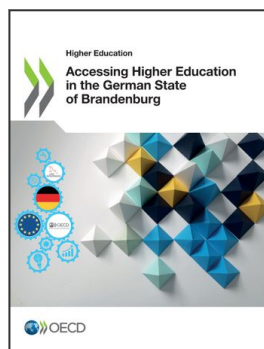
### Co-ordinate skills development across the state government and build policy evaluation strategies

#### Co-ordinate skills development across the state government

- *Staatskanzlei des Landes Brandenburg* (State Chancellery of Brandenburg) should nominate a multi-partite committee, including MWFK and all other relevant ministries and stakeholders, and entrust them with the establishment of a State Skills Council, including its structure, mandate and financing. That council should develop a long-term vision for Brandenburg as a location for research and innovation and advise the state government on how to develop the skills needed to realise this vision.
- Maintain strong links to public agencies and social partners to address the distinct skills and economic challenges of different regions. Ensure the sustainability of the HEIs' *Präsenzstellen* (which have pioneered innovative forms of co-operation between HEIs and local social and business partners).

#### Build policy evaluation strategies

- MWFK should build monitoring and evaluation strategies into the design of state policy initiatives and commission independent evaluations of policies and programmes.
- MWFK should consider establishing a working group on the federal fund for Lausitz and reviving the state working group on continuing education and training, as HEI demand for dialogue and clarification on these future-determining topics is strong.



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