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JHB – Jahrbuch für Historische Bildungsforschung 32 (2026): Measuring Qualifications: Labor and Education in the 20th Century

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Call for Abstracts for the Thematic Section and Call for Articles for the General Section of »Jahrbuch für Historische Bildungsforschung«, Vol. 32 (2026)

The Jahrbuch für Historische Bildungsforschung (JHB) comprises a thematic section (A) that focuses on a defined topic and also a general section (B) for non-thematic papers on historical issues, as well as a source with commentary/interpretation. A call for abstracts will be issued for the thematic section (A) and a call for articles for the general part (B).

This is a

1. **Call for abstracts for the thematic section (A):** The articles selected by the editorial team are subject to a double-blind peer-review process.
Deadline for submission of abstracts: 30.5.2025.
Deadline for submission of articles: 15.10.2025.
2. **Call for articles for the general section (B):** The source commentaries and interpretations will be subjected to editorial review.
Deadline for submission of articles: 15.10.2025.

Scientists in their qualification phase are particularly encouraged to submit contributions.

The 2026 edition of JHB will be published simultaneously as an electronic open access format (<https://jb-historische-bildungsforschung.de>) and as a print version. The electronic version enables the dynamic integration of media content (as well as images and video, audio content can also be included). Contributions that present such media content are particularly welcome.

(A) Call for Abstracts for the Thematic Section: Measuring Qualifications – Labor and Education in the 20th Century

Editors: Franziska Rehlinghaus (Georg-August-Universität Göttingen), Benno Nietzel (Universität Bielefeld/Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin) and Till Kössler (Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg)

Since the late 19th century, the gradual expansion of formal education in modern industrialized countries has formed a strong link between educational requirements and opportunities for career entry, career advancement, and social mobility. Throughout this period, examinations and formal educational credentials served as gateways to (sub)labor markets, occupations, jobs, and social positions. The broadening of the “authorization system” (“Berechtigungswesen”) was especially pronounced in Germany. On one hand, it aimed to objectify individual “performance,” “talent,” and “qualifications,” making them comparable and offering employers greater certainty. On the other hand, it generated debates about social mobility and equal opportunities for underprivileged groups. At its core was the question of which stakeholders and institutions had the authority to decide on the skills and competences that constituted “qualifications” and were thus prerequisites for certain career paths. Over time, government agencies, (professional) associations, commercial chambers, employers, trade unions, academic experts, and international organizations all claimed such authority. Meanwhile, people working in various fields sought official recognition of their qualifications, motivated by the hope of securing higher social prestige, better pay, and improved working conditions.

The formalization of qualifications was itself the subject of debate. Particular controversy surrounded those forms of qualification that did not fit established norms, for instance because they did not align with national standards, anticipated future requirements, or prioritized soft skills whose substance remained open to interpretation. During periods of political changes or shifts in (inter)national education and labor-market paradigms, established ideas of qualifications could break down or be challenged. Who was “suited” for which job or profession – and what that qualification “really” meant – was therefore historically contingent and subject to different interpretations. These developments raise questions: How were education and qualifications assessed, measured, and compared? What procedures and recognition cultures emerged? Which evidence practices underpinned them, and which skills did they highlight? Finally, how did these processes change education systems, labor markets, and individuals’ choices and actions?

This thematic section explores the history of education and training for the labor market in the 19th and 20th centuries, examining historical discourses, structures, and practices of defining and measuring qualifications. Its primary geographic focus is the German-speaking world in transnational contexts, although comparative and contrasting investigations from other areas are welcome. It covers the entire spectrum of educational levels, from schooling to vocational training, higher education, adult education, and continuing education.

Education and qualifications for the labor market are understood as historically variable concepts, made manageable through standardization, indicators, and increasingly also numerical data. Our central thesis is that the methods for determining qualifications developed in the 20th century claimed only temporary validity, remaining contentious and flexible over time. As demands on qualifications shifted, so too did dynamics of upgrading, downgrading, and devaluation. These were influenced by national, social, gendered, ethnic/racial, age-specific, or intersectional factors and resulted in unequal choices for career pathways and promotion opportunities. Significantly,

the assessment of qualifications was negotiated not only within national frameworks but also in relation to international developments and systemic competition.

We invite proposals that investigate how labor subjects were formed in these contexts, considering the various actors involved and examining the emergence of expert cultures. Additionally, we seek discussions of the impact of expert-produced knowledge on socioeconomic and cultural transformations. Our overall goal is to understand the history of vocational qualification—and its contested definitions—as a key indicator and driver of social change.

Possible contributions may address one or more of the following areas:

1. **Concepts and Standards:** Contributions under this heading might investigate which knowledge and skills fell under the concept of “qualification” and its contemporary (inter)national counterparts over various periods. For example, they could trace how the emphasis shifted from knowledge to competence, touching upon notions such as “aptitude,” “talent,” “performance,” “key qualifications,” “social competencies,” “skills,” and more. It would also be valuable to consider the consequences of these changes for the definition of qualifications and the ways in which related knowledge was produced.
2. **Actors and Practices:** Contributions here might focus on training and qualification regimes, as well as attempts to evaluate and organize or even predict future orders of work and qualification. We welcome analyses of self-declared and academic experts (e.g., from vocational education, economics, ergonomics, adult education research, educational economics, psychology, etc.) who developed new procedures and instruments for measuring and assessing qualifications. Potential contributions could also examine the activities of organizations and institutes engaged in vocational training research—whether national or international, union-related or business-focused—investigating the logics, materialities, and processes of cooperation and competition underpinning their research. We are particularly interested in how these developments shaped the organization of education and training systems.
3. **Subjects and Resonances:** This category addresses individual and professional group experiences, exploring how people responded to the categorization of their qualifications, or to their devaluation and revaluation. Contributions could examine whether these groups pursued professionalization or resisted formalization models in order to defend their own prevailing measurement and evaluation criteria. Such criteria could stand in contrast to official models and could represent efforts to maintain or elevate their status.

Proposals should include an abstract (maximum 300 words) and a short CV. Please send these by email to the three editors **by May 30, 2025**:

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Selected articles (maximum length 60,000 characters including spaces and footnotes) must be **submitted by October 15, 2025**. They will undergo a peer-review process prior to publication.

(B) Call for Articles: Non-thematic Contributions and Sources

For the general section, **contributions can be submitted until October 15, 2025**. All historical topics are welcome. Contributions relating to the period before the 18th century are particularly welcome. In addition, if possible, one prominent source should be published each year and interpreted in its context.

Please send your paper or your source proposal by e-mail to:
Katharina Vogel (e-mail: jhb@dipf.de)

Dates at a Glance

Deadline for the submission of abstracts of the thematic section: 30.5.2025.

Deadline for the submission of articles (thematic and general section): 15.10.2025.

Guidelines for Manuscript Design

Guidelines for manuscript design can be found at:

<https://www.jb-historische-bildungsforschung.de/editorial/guidelines-en.xml>