Advancing US and German Apprenticeship Best Practices

Speaker Biographies

Elke Büdenbender was born in the Weidenau district of Siegen on 14 January 1962. She has been married to Frank-Walter Steinmeier since 1995. They have one daughter. Elke Büdenbender attended intermediate secondary school in Siegen, after which she trained as an industrial clerk at a company of machine building industry in Siegen. She attended Siegerland College in Siegen in 1982 and then worked as a clerk at a logistics company. In 1985, she began her degree in law at Justus Liebig University in Giessen, where she passed her first state law examination in 1991. From 1987, she worked as a student assistant and later as a research assistant to Professor Brun-Otto Bryde at the Chair of Public Law. She completed her practical legal training at Hanover Regional Court in 1994, when she passed her second state law examination. Thereafter Ms Büdenbender worked as a judge at Hanover Administrative Court. She has been a judge at Berlin Administrative Court since 2000. (She is currently on long-term leave.)

Diana Elliott is a principal research associate in the Center on Labor, Human Services, and Population at the Urban Institute. Her work focuses on families’ financial security and economic mobility and the programs and policies that support them, including housing affordability, apprenticeships, and financial empowerment. Elliott was previously research manager of the Pew Charitable Trusts’ work on financial security and economic mobility, where she was instrumental in fielding a major national survey on American family finances and published numerous reports and briefs about the state of financial well-being and economic mobility in the United States. Before joining Pew, Elliott was a family demographer in the fertility and family statistics branch in the Social, Economic, and Housing Statistics Division at the US Census Bureau. Elliott holds a PhD in sociology from the University of Maryland, College Park.

Miriam Farnbauer is the project director of the Skills Initiative, an effort that promotes apprenticeship training based on the German Dual Education System in the US. To help tackle the global skills shortage in the tech and manufacturing industry, Farnbauer leads a number of projects to enable dialogue and cooperation between the US and Germany. Her focus is to bring stakeholders at a local, regional and national level together to create a sustainable pipeline of talent and solutions. She is a participant of the NextGen Initiative of the American Chamber of Commerce in Germany and serves as a board member of the Los Angeles chapter of the American Council on Germany. Farnbauer holds a master’s degree in Education and Intercultural Communication from the University of Augsburg, Germany.

Joshua Johnson is a director at JFF. A member of the team in the JFF Center for Apprenticeship & Work Based Learning, he leads efforts to advance diversity, equity and inclusion in apprenticeship, with a specific focus on helping employers make commitments to building inclusive Registered Apprenticeship programs. Before joining JFF, Joshua was the state director of apprenticeship in Wisconsin. In that role, he oversaw growth in all initiatives related to the creation of intentional career pathways for Wisconsin citizens. His passion for apprenticeship is rooted in its ability to eradicate poverty. Earlier in his career, Joshua worked for the Wisconsin Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, where he helped employers connect to the untapped talent pool of individuals with disabilities. While he was the Wisconsin state director of apprenticeship, Joshua was elected by his fellow state directors to serve as vice president of the National Association of State and Territorial Apprenticeship Directors. Joshua spent nearly 10 years in prison and has shared his personal story of reentry to encourage justice-involved individuals to refocus and get
connected prior to release. He also speaks at events about the importance of employers creating diverse and inclusive apprenticeships to ensure that they can compete locally, nationally, and globally. In 2007, Joshua completed a Construction Craft Laborers apprenticeship and then spent three years as a construction craft laborer journeyworker building highways in Illinois and Wisconsin.

**Dr. Hannelore Kress** has been working as a senior project manager since 2012 at the Federal Institute for Vocational Training (BIBB) in Bonn. Her work focuses on systemic consulting in Russia, USA, Georgia, Slovakia and China; since 2016 she is also the coordinator of the German-Israel Programe of the Ministry of Education and Research. Digitization, sustainability, development and localization of innovative VET tools, capacity development, entrepreneurship and career orientation play an important role in her activities. Prior to joining BIBB, she spent around 15 years working in Russia, the US and Kyrgyzstan for NGOs and as adviser to Secretaries of Labour, Social Development and Migration: developing training programs in post-conflict regions, for prisoners, marginalized and rural groups, organizing humanitarian aid and strategic organizational development in the field of evaluation and market development of social services. Ms. Kress holds a PhD from Moscow State University in Economics and a MA in Sociology, Media / Communications. She has published several papers in Russian journals and training manuals in the US on the subject of Vocational Training, Social Capital, Community Development and VET Indicators. The dedicated runner sees herself as a data skeptical green economist.

**Timo Oßwald** and is an apprentice at Festo in Germany. He graduated with Abitur from the Theodor-Heuss-Gymnasium in Esslingen (Germany). Starting his apprenticeship in September 2020, he is already vice Champion of mechatronics in Germany.

**Natalie Palugyai** was appointed Secretary of the California Labor & Workforce Development Agency by Governor Newsom on July 14, 2021. Secretary Palugyai is the first Latina to serve as California Labor Secretary. In her role, Secretary Palugyai serves as the Governor’s cabinet advisor on labor issues and employment programs for workers and businesses throughout California. Secretary Palugyai oversees the state departments and boards that enforce labor laws, including minimum wage and occupational safety standards, provide state disability and unemployment insurance benefits, fund workforce training and apprenticeship programs, combat wage theft, protect injured workers, and arbitrate public sector contract disputes. Natalie is a nationally recognized thought leader in public sector business transformation, strategy, and implementation with over 20 years of experience in federal government and higher education. She has spent almost half of her public service career within the U.S. Department of Labor where she served first as a compliance officer with the Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs and most recently as a Senior Management Advisor for the Secretary of Labor under President Barack Obama’s Administration. In addition to her work on worker protection and enforcement strategy, Natalie launched and formalized the department’s first integrated performance management accountability system, resulting in concrete improvements to both operational performance and organizational engagement. Prior to leading the Labor & Workforce Development Agency, Natalie served as Senior Advisor for Strategic Initiatives at Johns Hopkins University, where she lead the university’s Global Operations Initiative, establishing both governance frameworks and corporate structuring strategies in support of academic and research expansion globally.

**Jordan Pounds** is a mechatronic technician apprentice at Blum USA. She graduated from Nation Ford High School in Fort Mill, South Carolina in 2020. In high school, she took the engineering pathway and participated in the engineering program at Central Piedmont Community College where she studied mechatronics.
Stefan Schneider, Consul General of the Federal Republic of Germany, started his diplomatic career in 1987 and his many assignments have taken him all over the world. He served as Head of the Legal and Consular Section in Thailand, Head of the Trade and Commerce Section in Bulgaria, Deputy Consul General in Miami, Counsellor for Political Affairs in Paris and Consul General in Izmir. Before being posted to Los Angeles, he served as Head of the Cultural Affairs Department at the German Embassy in Rome. At the German Foreign Office, he was assigned to the Middle East desk, the Disarmament and Arms Control desk, the German as a Foreign Language division, and he served as Head of International Academic Exchange, also responsible for the Fulbright Program. Mr. Schneider studied law in Munich and Cologne. He also earned a degree in French literature from the Sorbonne University in Paris. He speaks English, French, Italian, Spanish and Bulgarian. He was born in Cologne. He has family in the United States and also in this context is playing his part in deepening the German-American friendship and strengthening family ties.