

Delivering TVET through Quality Apprenticeships

Virtual conference on the UNESCO-UNEVOC e-Forum

15 to 26 June 2015

Alessandra Molz
Researcher and Consultant on Skills Development and Social Inclusion

Introduction

Apprenticeship is a social institution with a long history, having ensured over centuries the transmission of work skills from one generation to the next. Around the world apprenticeship continues to exist, often in a modernized form. In the face of global youth employment crises, large cohorts of unemployed youth and skills mismatches, many countries wish to explore the option of introducing or improving apprenticeship schemes as a way to better address these problems. Other countries are trying to modernize and formalize "informal" and "traditional" apprenticeships as a way to expand quality TVET in their countries.

Countries such as Germany, Austria or Switzerland use apprenticeship as the main way of delivering formal vocational training. In others, apprenticeship is an alternative option to school-based technical and vocational education and training (TVET). Countries with large informal economies often have "traditional" and "informal" forms of apprenticeships (e.g. many West African countries), which often represent the principal means for the majority of the young population to acquire work skills.

In its [Final Report](#) containing a draft text of the Recommendation Concerning Technical and Vocational Education and Training, UNESCO suggests that "Work-based learning in its various forms, including ... apprenticeships ... should be promoted." It furthermore states that "Public policies should foster and facilitate quality apprenticeships ... to help youth to develop their knowledge, skills and competencies and gain work experience" (Points 30, 31, 32).

The International Labour Organization (ILO) has recently formulated a work-definition of modern apprenticeship and describes it as a "... unique form of vocational education, combining on-the-job learning and school-based training, for specifically defined competencies and work processes. It is regulated by law and based on written employment contract with a compensatory payment and standard social protection scheme. A formal assessment and a recognized certification come at the end of a clearly identified duration."¹

¹ ["Key elements of quality apprenticeships", ILO, September 2012](#)

Benefits and issues with apprenticeship training

Generally, countries with well-established apprenticeship systems tend to enjoy lower youth unemployment. Some of them are considered economies with quality skilled labour, leading to high productivity and innovation capacity. Well-designed apprenticeships can play a vital role in:

- smoothing school-to-work transitions by providing relevant work experience in a real labour-market environment while learning a trade;
- equipping youth with the skills needed by companies;
- being an effective training methodology for transferring complex skillsets, including for high-technology occupations;
- combining work and training opportunities, linked with a salary or allowance;
- enabling companies to better cater for immediate and future staff needs;
- making TVET systems more responsive to skills shortages and skills mismatch.

Apprenticeships are also increasingly applied at the university level as "dual university studies". Students attend classes and receive practical skills training in a company for a university-level job. These arrangements are becoming increasingly popular. They help to provide university students with work experience and to shape the curricula according to the skills needs of the companies.

Problems with apprenticeship training can arise in the case of low-quality work and learning conditions, for example when young people are exploited as "cheap labour" and or when the work environment is unsafe and inadequate for a young person with little work experience. Another problem presents itself when apprentices are not being effectively trained or when apprenticeships provide only a few skills that are relevant for one particular company, but do not provide the apprentice with the skills to find employment with other companies after the training is finished.

"Traditional" or "informal" apprenticeships can be found in the informal economy and rural settings. In **traditional apprenticeship**, skills are transmitted from a father or a mother to their children, close family or clan members. Traditional apprenticeship systems have in many regions evolved into informal apprenticeship systems which are open to apprentices from outside the family or kin group. **Informal apprenticeship** is based on an informal work and training agreement in a practitioner's business. While formal apprenticeship is founded on policies and legislation, informal apprenticeship is embedded and regulated by local culture and traditions. For many youth in developing countries, informal apprenticeship is the only way of acquiring professional skills. Informal apprenticeship can involve a number of issues: long working hours, unsafe working conditions, low or no allowances or wages, little or no social protection and strong gender imbalances are among the most important decent work deficits. Upgrading and formalizing informal apprenticeships can address these issues and have positive effects on boosting local economies and investing in a country's skills base.

Quality apprenticeships

To address such problems and to assist countries in setting up or enlarging apprenticeship schemes, the International Labour Organization is advocating for modern "Quality Apprenticeships", which include good work and training conditions for the apprentice and at the same time generate benefits for the training company. It is also important to emphasize that apprenticeships are different from other forms of workplace learning, such as internships, traineeships or industry attachments. In

All apprenticeships are workplace learning – but not all forms of workplace learning are apprenticeships!

apprenticeship the company-based training follows a structured training plan and leads to a full qualification.

Generally, modern "Quality Apprenticeships" will comply with all of the following characteristics:

- ✓ A **contractual agreement** between the apprentice and the training company (and in some cases also the training school), which clearly sets out the **rights and responsibilities** of each party. The apprenticeship has a **fixed duration**, regulated by law or the training contract.
- ✓ The largest share of the training takes place in the **company**. Usually the apprentice is considered an **"employee"** with an entitlement to regularly participate in training. The apprentice also receives a **salary or allowance**.
- ✓ The apprentice is entitled to regular **complementary school-based training** following an overall training programme coordinated with the training companies.
- ✓ Training and work conditions in the companies respect the national **labour legislation**, particularly the **youth labour code**. Like the co-workers in the company, the apprentice is entitled to **social protection** such as health and accident insurance. **Occupational safety and health** standards are strictly observed.
- ✓ Upon successful completion, apprentices receive a **nationally valid and officially recognized certificate**.
- ✓ The company-based training follows a **structured training programme** to learn a **full trade/occupation** according to pre-defined standards.

The training process in apprenticeship

This last aspect is highly important, because the intention of apprenticeship is not to provide TVET-school students with "some company-practice" besides their school-based training. Apprenticeship means that, at the company, the apprentices are trained in the whole set of competences of a specific trade or occupation through a systematic and structured training. This is complemented by school-based training. The apprentice will acquire "transferrable skills" which can be used in other companies as well. Naturally, apprentices will also pick up company-specific skills. However, by the end of the training an apprentice must be fully proficient in the occupation he or she was trained for.

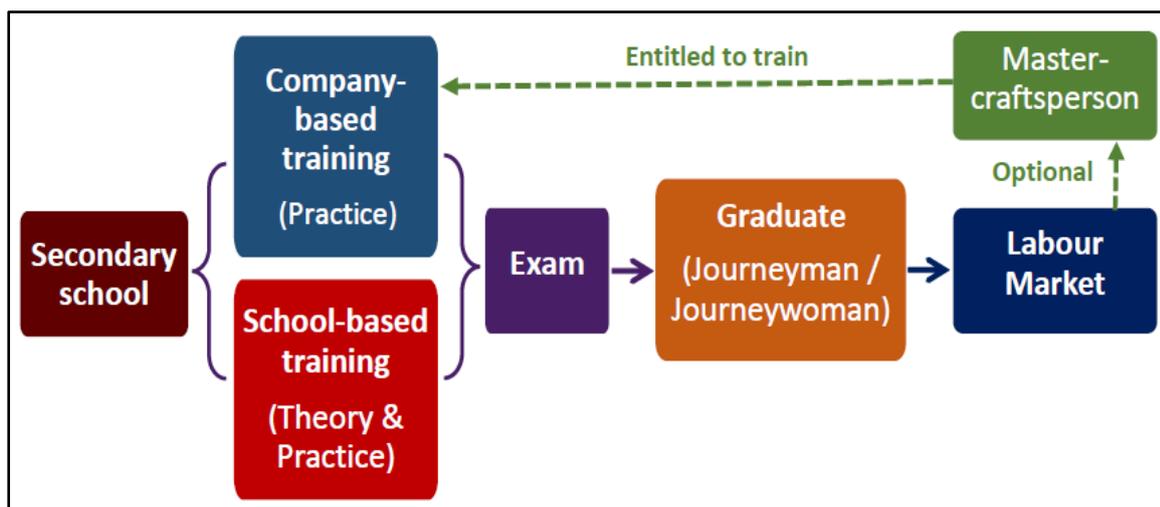


Figure 1. "Classic" apprenticeship pathway

The way that apprenticeship systems are set up can differ considerably between countries. A generalized "classic" pathway is represented in Figure 1: a young person starts an apprenticeship after finishing secondary school (e.g. between age 15 to 18) and will be trained during the apprenticeship in two

different places: the company and a TVET school. The way the alternation between company-based and school-based training is organized varies between countries, but also between occupations. Mostly, three to four days of company training are complemented with one or two days at school. Alternatively, it can also be organized in alternating blocks of several weeks. There may also be a first phase of school-based induction training preceding a second phase of company-school alternation.

School-based training should not be mistaken for "theoretical" training. The TVET schools impart both theoretical background knowledge in a classroom setting as well as inducing the apprentices in practical skills in the school workshops and laboratories.

Countries have different ways of coordinating company and school-based training. In the companies apprentices are generally guided by a trainer and closely followed by a training manager (e.g. a master-craftsperson) who should be in contact with the school. The teachers and instructors at school will have apprentices from different countries in their classes, with different degrees of advancement in their practical training. It is therefore important that company training follows a framework plan which is valid for all companies, specifies time limits and learning objectives and thereby provides basic orientation to TVET school. This plan should not be too prescriptive for the companies, leaving them sufficient flexibility to align apprentice training to their business programme. In addition, tools such as "log-books" can be used to record the progress with company-training and school performance.

Upon successful completion and the award of the certificates, the graduate skilled worker (often called "journeyman" or "journeywoman") will look for employment. Many apprentices will also stay with their training company. Some systems offer possibilities for further training to become "Master-craftspersons" (or a similar degree) and thereby being entitled to supervise the training of apprentices.

Key elements of modern quality apprenticeship systems

Apprenticeships operate in complex environments that are determined by factors such as traditions, socio-economic structures and labour regulations. "Exporting" apprenticeship from one country to another has proven to be problematic and likely to be unsuccessful. However all apprenticeship schemes follow similar common features which can serve as guiding principles and be adapted to different national contexts. In a recent study the ILO has identified underlying common principles of successful modern apprenticeships:

- 1. Social dialogue:** Social dialogue refers to all forms of negotiation and consultations between governments, employers' associations and workers' organizations (trade unions) on labour matters. In well-performing apprenticeship systems, social dialogue is usually strong and the social partners play an important role in governance of apprenticeship, financial monitoring, assessing skills needs, standard setting, monitoring working conditions and examinations.
- 2. Roles and responsibilities:** Apprenticeship depends on a clear set of roles and responsibilities between the social partners and government authorities at the macro level and the companies, training schools and apprentices at the micro level. At the meso level, there is a need for institutional support and facilitation between stakeholders for the practical operation of an apprenticeship scheme. Such support can be provided by chambers of commerce, employment services or other institutions.
- 3. Financing:** A sound financing that includes co-funding mechanisms between government and the companies is crucial to the success of apprenticeship. Financing needs to provide the right incentives for all stakeholders, while keeping costs at a reasonable level. Particularly companies need to be assured that their investment in the apprentices will pay back.

4. **Legislation:** Modern and formal apprenticeship is usually regulated by: a) a law that defines the roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders and the procedures for skills standards, curriculum and examinations; b) an apprenticeship contract that sets out the rights and duties of company and apprentice; c) the national labour law with provisions on youth employment protection to regulate the work conditions of apprentices. Legislation should be coherent, simple and effective and adapt itself to the existing national institutional set-ups. Over-regulation should be avoided and by no means should legislation be overtaken from other countries.

In conclusion, apprenticeships yield many advantages for quality TVET. There is no standardized model of apprenticeships and countries that wish to introduce apprenticeships or to modernize an existing scheme need to find a model that fits their local conditions. The international discussion on how to do this has just begun and the participants of this online conference are invited to share their experiences, their ideas and opinions and to ask questions and advice from other participants.

Join us!

Join us on the UNESCO-UNEVOC [e-Forum](#) to discuss delivering TVET through quality apprenticeships with participants from all over the world. The virtual conference will be moderated by Alessandra Molz, a researcher and consultant in the area of skills development and apprenticeship based in Leipzig, Germany.

To participate, sign up [here](#).

About the facilitator

The virtual conference will be facilitated by Ms Alessandra Molz, a researcher and freelance consultant in the area of skills development, in particular apprenticeship systems and social inclusion.

Alessandra has an extensive international work experience in the area of skills development, employment and labour market policies all over the world.

She has worked particularly with the ILO and the International Training Centre of the ILO, where she designed and managed the ILO "Academy on Skills Development" from 2011 to 2013. In addition, she gathered further work experience with Cedefop and UNDP.



References and additional resources

1. ["Apprenticeship Systems – what do we know?" Michael Axmann and Christine Hofmann, ILO 2013](#)
2. [Key elements of quality apprenticeships, ILO, September 2012](#)
3. [Final Report containing a draft text of the Recommendation concerning Technical and Vocational Education and Training, UNESCO 2015](#)
4. ["Normative instruments concerning technical education and training", UNESCO 2004](#)

5. ["Overview of apprenticeship systems and issues" ILO contribution to the G20 Task Force on Employment, Hillary Steedman, ILO 2012](#)
6. ["The Architecture of Innovative Apprenticeship", by Ludger Deitmer, Ursel Hauschildt, Felix Rauner, Helmut Zelloth, Springer \(editors\) Science+Business Media Dordrecht 2013](#)
7. ["Rediscovering Apprenticeship", by Felix Rauner and Erica Smith \(editors\), UNESCO-UNEVOC/Springer 2010](#)
8. ["Towards a Model Apprenticeship Framework. A Comparative Analysis of National Apprenticeship Systems". International Labour Organization, International Bank for Reconstruction and Development , World Bank 2013](#)
9. ["Upgrading Informal Apprenticeship – a resource guide for Africa", ILO 2012](#)