



International
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Flanders
State of the Art

The Future of Work and Lifelong Learning

► Adapting apprenticeships for the reskilling and upskilling of adults



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- ▶ **Adapting apprenticeships for the reskilling and upskilling of adults**

▶ Foreword

New technologies, demographic shifts, climate change, globalization and more recently the global health pandemic are causing major disruptions to the world of work. Against this backdrop, it becomes ever more important to build an agile workforce capable of navigating the fast-changing labour market through appropriate and timely skilling, reskilling and upskilling. The use of apprenticeship models or dual training systems can be an effective solution in the context of the future of work, as it bridges the gap between education and training system and the world of work.

Although apprenticeship is a centuries-old system which enable young persons to acquire skills related to specific occupations, questions are increasingly being raised about its relevance in the context of the future of work and lifelong learning.

The ILO has therefore launched a research project – *Apprenticeship Development for Universal Lifelong Learning and Training* – which aims to generate new ideas and policy options to modernise apprenticeship systems. The project is funded by the Government of Flanders. The research aims to explore how apprenticeship systems are being modernised and transformed to promote and enable lifelong learning and decent work for youth, adults, and older workers (both employed and unemployed). The research also covers other forms of work-based learning options for students in VET institutes.

The research paper titled *“Adapting apprenticeships for the reskilling and upskilling of adults”* has been produced by the ILO as part of the ADULT project. It explores how apprenticeships can enable the people to acquire new skills and update existing skills throughout their working life; thereby addressing the fast-changing labour market demand.

Furthermore, the paper highlights the new role of apprenticeship training within lifelong learning systems.

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Ashwani Aggarwal (ILO) managed the research project, led the design and development of this thematic paper and also reviewed, edited and finalized this publication. Anita Sharma (ILO) coordinated with consultants and reviewers and also reviewed and provided comments on the paper.

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▶ List of acronyms

| | |
|-------------------|--|
| ABU | Allgemeinbildender Unterricht [General Education] |
| ALMP | Active labour market policy |
| AUB | Arbejdsgivernes Uddannelsesbidrag [The Employers' Reimbursement Fund] |
| BAföG | Bundesausbildungsförderungsgesetz [Federal Training Promotion Act] |
| BIBB | Bundesinstitut für Berufsbildung [Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training] |
| Cedefop | European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training |
| CMEs | Coordinated market economies |
| COVID-19 | Coronavirus disease |
| CVT | Continuing vocational education |
| D-A-CH | Austria, Germany and Switzerland |
| EaFA | European Alliance for Apprenticeships |
| EFUEA | European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships |
| EQF | European Qualifications Framework |
| ESF | European Social Fund |
| EU | European Union |
| EUROSTAT | Statistical office of the European Union |
| EUV | Erhvervsuddannelser for Voksne [VET for adults] |
| GAN | Global Apprenticeship Network |
| ILO | International Labour Organization |
| ISCED | International Standard Classification of Education |
| IVET | Initial vocational education and training |
| LLL | Lifelong learning |
| LME | Liberal market economy |
| NEET | Not in education, employment or training |
| NQF | National qualifications framework |
| OECD | Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development |
| PES | Public employment service |
| RLO | Registered training organization |
| RPL | Recognition of prior learning |
| SETAs | Sector Education and Training Authorities |
| SMEs | Small and medium enterprises |
| UNESCO | United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization |
| UNESCO-UIS | UNESCO Institute for Statistics |
| UOE | UNESCO-UIS/OECD/EUROSTAT |
| WBL | Work-based learning |
| VET | Vocational education and training |

Executive Summary

The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has shaken up labour markets around the world. Never before have so many people changed jobs or the demands for upskilling and reskilling been greater. Although the green and digital “twin” transition is accelerating the pace of change, upskilling and reskilling of adults had already become increasingly important before the pandemic, due to the greying of the workforce, extended phases of adolescence, prolonged education–work transitions and less linear career pathways. These developments are foreseeable also for low-income countries, where the effects of longevity are currently offset by large cohorts of young people and high birth rates.

Apprenticeships for adults¹ are a viable option to meet the growing need for upskilling and reskilling and, in comparison to on-the-job or non-formal training, they enable more sustainable career changes. Completing an apprenticeship in adulthood makes it easier to change an occupation or a job, move up or across corporate hierarchies, become self-employed or gain access to further and, in many countries, higher education.

Despite the abundance of comparative studies on apprenticeship that have been produced within the last ten years, very little is known about apprenticeships for upskilling and reskilling of adults. It is almost impossible to find relevant information for the many low- and middle-income countries. This certainly relates to differences in research infrastructure across countries but also underscores the fact that most low- and middle-income countries have larger youth populations and therefore consider skilling of youth as a more pressing policy issue than that of adults. Another limitation for our research has been that adult apprenticeships are not mirrored in the register-based education statistics of UNESCO-UIS/OECD/EUROSTAT (UOE) and comparison of national data is challenging. Further, regulations and perceptions regarding the age of adults differ across societies. In any case, age as such is only a poor proxy for characterizing adult apprenticeships. Besides cultural differences, the particular life situations and experiences of learners, their motivation and maturity as well their prior knowledge and qualifications are also important for determining the differences between apprentices in adolescence, young adulthood and middle adulthood.

Our analysis reveals that adult apprenticeships exist at practically all levels of education, from basic levels to advanced levels in higher education, and address diverse target groups, from low-skilled migrants to higher education graduates. However, provision is often limited and countries tend to limit apprenticeships to specific levels, learners and functions.

Countries also differ greatly in terms of the extent to which apprenticeships are used by adults. In Canada, Finland, Ireland and the United States apprenticeships are predominantly used by adults older than 25. In countries such as Denmark, England, Australia, Indonesia, South Africa and Korea, both young people and adults are engaged in apprenticeship training and the share of adult apprentices has tended to grow over the last two decades. In contrast, in Austria, Germany and Switzerland, but also in Egypt, India and Turkey, most people start their apprenticeships in their teens. However, even in Austria, Germany and Switzerland, the average starting age of apprentices has risen in recent years, due to extended years of schooling, later transitions to work and the inclusion of migrants. Further, a low proportion of adult apprentices in these countries does not necessarily signal a lack of appropriate training provisions and support measures for adults but may simply reflect the strong role of initial training and the fact that apprenticeship provision is concentrated at the upper-secondary level.

¹ This report recognizes the agreement within international statistics to define adult workers as those aged 25–65 and focuses on this age group. However, the report also challenges biological and chronological definitions of age and understands “adulthood” as an institutional and cultural concept as much as an individual one. Following Erik Erikson, it broadly distinguishes between early, middle and late adulthood, with young adults (below 25) as a subgroup of early adulthood.

Extending apprenticeship opportunities to adults and older workers requires corresponding adjustments in apprenticeship systems and programmes at various levels. Essential starting points are, on the one hand, the prior work experiences, skills and knowledge as well as the particular family and income situations of the adult apprentices, and on the other hand, the motivations and possibilities of the training companies. Consequently, recognition of prior learning (RPL), shortening of the duration of programmes, modularization, individualization, distance learning, adult-centred learning approaches, and subsidies for individuals and employers are among the key leverage points.

There are a variety of existing measures (for example, grants, bonuses, tax incentives) to subsidize companies to provide apprenticeship places in general or to specifically offer apprenticeship places to adults and unemployed. General incentives for companies to provide more apprenticeship places benefit both adults and youth, although depending on the labour market situation, adults may benefit more. Further, there are numerous financial instruments that are directed to the upskilling and reskilling of individual adults in general (for example, training leaves, training vouchers, individual learning accounts) that can also be used for apprenticeships. However, the suitability and transferability of such instruments must be examined on a case-by-case basis, as there is no cross-country meta-evaluation of such instruments available yet.

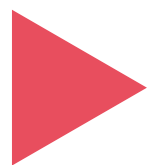
The higher financial needs of adult apprentices are either fulfilled by determining higher apprentice pay for adults or by individual grants received in addition to the general apprentice remuneration. No systematic comparison of the effectiveness of the two approaches is available, but it can be assumed that the former model (higher apprentice pay for adults) is more likely to attract adult learners. The latter approach is more likely in countries where apprenticeships are predominantly used by young people.

Besides financial support (either to companies or individuals), shortening the process of acquiring recognized apprenticeship certificates, either by RPL, general shortening of programmes or access to final external examination (or a combination of those) is a key and common practice in many countries. Applying adult-centred approaches to teaching and learning is another important precondition for high-quality adult apprenticeships and may also inspire improvements in the organization of apprenticeships for youth. In this respect, the professionalism of adult educators and career counsellors is critical in supporting adult learners to achieve their educational and career aspirations and overcome social stereotypes and inequalities.

Gender segregation in apprenticeship training, in particular in the skilled trades, is very high and should be a major concern for governments and social partners. So is the issue of decent work. Creating and securing high-quality jobs is a precondition for quality apprenticeships and hence a future key task for social partners and governments alike.

Based on our analysis, we recommend a number of actions, including:

- ensuring that quality frameworks and standards for apprenticeships of international organizations explicitly refer to adult learning and disadvantaged learners, and that they adhere to the principles of lifelong learning;
- encouraging national governments to ensure that apprenticeship for adults are stated explicitly as an option for upskilling and re-skilling in their national lifelong learning or skills strategies;
- encouraging social partners to secure the quality of jobs and workplaces, because this is a precondition for quality apprenticeships, and to foster measures to overcome gender inequality;
- extending the existing collection of co-funding instruments to a worldwide usage while considering the different contexts of high-, medium- and low-income countries;
- improving international data on adult apprenticeships by providing information on enrolments in work-based learning by age in the UOE data collection.



1

Introduction

Introduction

Digitalization, artificial intelligence, and the greening of the economy are driving up the demand for individual skills while, at the same time, a “greying” of the workforce takes place in many countries around the world. New skills requirements arise at ever shorter intervals, testing everyone’s ability to continuously learn and adapt previously acquired skills and competences. This accelerated pace of change challenges the young and old alike.

There are further reasons why the reskilling and upskilling of adults is becoming increasingly important: late adolescence has extended (Arnett 2015) and education–work transitions are frequently prolonged; career pathways are becoming less linear and twists and turns more frequent; and disruptions to an individual life course due to exogenic “shocks” are on the increase, with the COVID-19 pandemic as a recent example. Further, in high-income countries, increased life expectancy requires prolonged careers in gainful work and workers contributing to the social protection system for a longer period. This is a development that is also foreseeable for low-income countries, where the effects of longevity are currently offset by large cohorts of young people and high birth rates.

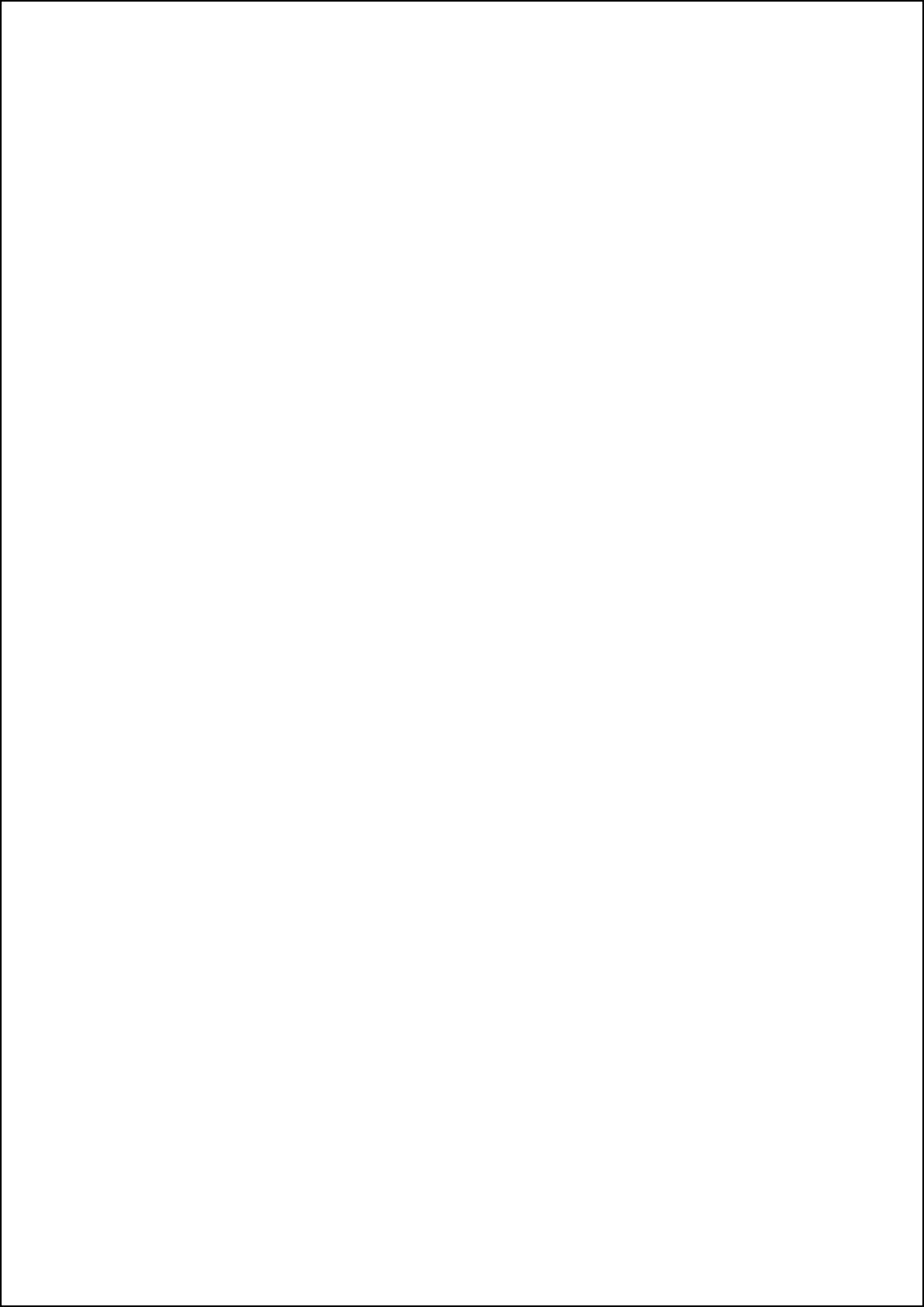
Where apprenticeship training is strong, it has repeatedly proven to be an effective way to secure the necessary skills in changing economies as well as to keep youth unemployment low in years of crisis (Eichhorst et al. 2015). Besides, apprenticeships are an important option for those who may have a history of negative experiences at school and are reluctant to enrol again in purely classroom-based learning activities (Cedefop 2016). Further, apprenticeships can support the re-integration of unemployed adults into the labour market (Cedefop 2013).

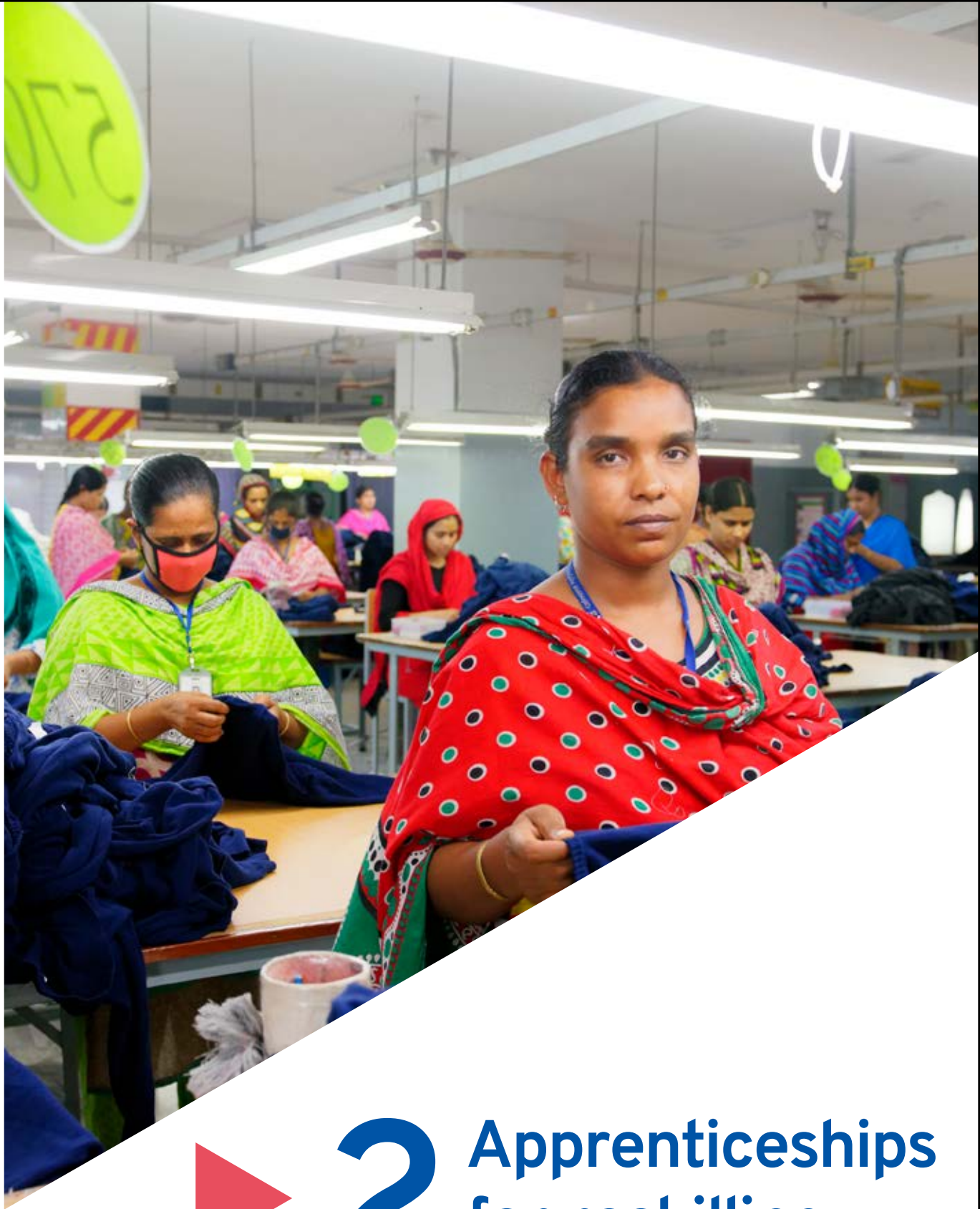
Changing and future societal and economic challenges on the one hand and the fundamental potential of apprenticeship training to offer solutions for these challenges on the other illustrate the urgent need to make apprenticeships fit for lifelong learning and to find a place for them in a country’s lifelong learning system.

This report aims to provide evidence of successful practices and recommendations for adjusting apprenticeship training to the needs of adult learners (in this report, 25 to 65 years old) as a potential key step within their lifelong and life-wide learning careers. The report is structured into four main chapters. Chapter 1 introduces adult apprenticeships in the wider context of lifelong learning and upskilling policies, presents our understanding of adult apprenticeships, and summarizes the scarce literature in this field. Chapter 2 introduces the various forms of adult apprenticeship, their position within the system of education and their links to employment, and thus takes a macro-level perspective. It also provides possible explanations for national differences in apprenticeship systems catering to adults. Chapter 3 elaborates on the key aspects of adult apprenticeships, such as apprentice pay and social benefits, incentives for employers, RPL and learning methods, and thus takes a micro-level perspective. The concluding Chapter 4 provides our lessons learned, conclusions and recommendations. In addition, two case studies have been presented, one about apprenticeships in Finland in the context of the overall vocational education and training (VET) system (Case Study A) and one on the process of artisan RPL in South Africa (Case Study B). Due to their different focus, the case studies also differ in scope, approach and lessons learned.



While the scope of this report is global, it cannot be denied that more information and evidence are available for high-income countries and countries with traditionally strong apprenticeship systems, which inevitably leads to a bias. Clearly, the lessons learned about what works in apprenticeship training in Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries cannot simply be transferred to economically less developed countries, where, in addition, the gap between urban and rural areas, between artisans and the industrialized economy, and the digital divide are particularly pronounced. This may be true for all topics related to apprenticeship training, but it is especially true for the topic of apprenticeship for adults, given that low-income countries have the youngest and high-income countries the oldest population in the world.





2 Apprenticeships for reskilling and upskilling adults

Apprenticeships for reskilling and upskilling adults: Policy context, definitions and state of research

► 2.1 Policy context

In addition to exacerbating the growing long-term need for upskilling and reskilling as spelled out in the introduction, the COVID-19 pandemic has shaken up labour markets around the world to an extent not seen in many years and indeed not thought possible. While 2020 surpassed various long-term national unemployment records, 2021 will surpass many records in the number of job vacancies. Never before have so many people changed jobs or wished to change jobs. Never before we have seen millions unemployed on the one hand and so many rapidly evolving and growing skills needs on the other hand, leading to jobs that can't be filled due to skills mismatches (Chopra-McGowan and Reddy 2020). In short, we are currently experiencing an exceptional demand for reskilling, though many policies and measures to support reskilling and upskilling of adults² were already in place before the pandemic (Cavaglia, McNally, and Ruiz-Valenzuela 2021).

The retraining of hospitality staff or flight attendants to become care professionals by offering shortened apprenticeships is an example for current reskilling measures. In addition, the recent apprenticeships offered to refugees and asylum seekers are a good practice for reskilling migrants and integrating them into labour markets and local communities. On the other hand, master craftsperson training has long been the essential upskilling option for skilled workers who want to move up in the company, become trainers/mentors or become self-employed.³

² In this report, reskilling refers to someone learning a new set of skills in order to perform a new/different job with the same or a different employer (retraining), while upskilling refers to an employee learning additional skills to be better equipped to do his/her job or a related job with more responsibility and/or higher requirements. Of course, there is a large grey zone between reskilling and upskilling, which is why the terms usually form a collocation and are rarely defined separately. Also, it should be noted that the terms have originally been mainly used in human resources and economics literature, and only very rarely by adult education researchers. On the contrary, the latter have frequently expressed concern about the downgrading of the role and value of adult education to upskilling and reskilling (e.g. Unwin 2012, 760).

³ For instance, in Germany and Austria, for VET graduates, nationally regulated further training qualifications are available, e.g., the "Meister (master craftsperson)" (EQF 6) and issued by the chambers. See Apprenticeship Toolbox.

In general, and in order to overcome low levels of skills, to progress up the educational ladder or to acquire new skills to do a different job or become better on the current job, adults may need to engage in learning activities over extended periods of time and may rely on support in one of the following forms of reskilling and upskilling:

- ▶ access to a learning-conducive workplace, including substantial opportunities for learning by doing, support from colleagues and potential spells of further training off the job; informal apprenticeships for adults are an example of such policies (reskilling/upskilling through informal learning)
- ▶ access to extended periods of further education and training that do not lead to a formal qualification, but that, together with some learning on the job, lead to an increase in the level of skills (reskilling/upskilling through non-formal learning)
- ▶ access to an education programme, including apprenticeships for adults, that results in the acquisition of a formal qualification (reskilling/upskilling through formal education for adults)

It is this third type of reskilling and upskilling within which adult apprenticeship can be located and which will be the focus of this report (see also Chapter 2).

The various forms of reskilling and upskilling have been emphasized differently over past decades and advocated by international organizations using a variety of key concepts. The idea that adults should have the opportunity to return to formal schooling at any point in their life course and be able to acquire any qualification offered to young people was first proposed by the OECD in 1973. The strategy of “recurrent education” (OECD 1973) aimed to overcome the youth-centredness of the education sector and support adults to respond to the necessities of quickly changing labour market demands through longer spells in education. The state would cover the costs of formal adult education under the same conditions as for young people, mainly through postponing investments from youth to adulthood. Ideas of recurrent education led to a strengthening of the provision of “second chance” education (Inbar 1990) that had been growing across Europe since the early 20th century.

Alongside these developments, in the 1970s new emphasis was placed on the potential of non-formal and informal learning. Non-formal education had been identified as a key lever to meet the challenges of low-income countries that could not afford a quick extension of formal schooling (Coombs and Ahmed 1974, Coombs 1968). Adults could be supported in their learning at any place (life-wide) and at any time (life-long). For adults who had not benefited from teacher-centred schooling, learner-centred and tailored forms of non-formal provision became accepted as a valid alternative (Rogers 2004, 2014). Moreover, greater attention was given to learning from experience, through informal learning in gainful work and private life.

The role of the workplace as a site of lifelong learning has been another long-standing issue for transnational organizations, particularly the International Labour Organization (ILO). By combining workplace learning with continuing vocational education (CVT), employers can provide upskilling pathways. Employees’ rights to access to CVT or paid educational leave (as encapsulated in the related ILO Convention of 1974) play an important role in this regard.

All policies providing reskilling and upskilling opportunities share a particular concern – that low-qualified and low-skilled adults show a far lower rate of participation in formal and non-formal learning activities than their better-qualified counterparts. In short, adult learning systems are currently insufficiently able to support those adults who need access to upskilling opportunities the most.

Despite the long tradition of lifelong learning policies, apprenticeship training for adults, in particular to support low-skilled and unemployed adults, has only received more visibility and momentum over the last two decades (Cedefop 2019, Markowitsch and Wittig 2020).

► 2.2 Defining adult apprenticeship and target groups

In this report, and in line with international meaning of the phrase, “adult apprenticeships” are understood as a particular type of formal education and training (i.e. one leading to nationally recognized qualifications), either tailored to or accessible to adult learners, which qualifies learners to engage in a specific occupation by combining work-based training with productive work (based on some form of agreement with an employer, whether private or public, specifying mutual rights and obligations as well as financial compensations) with off-the-job learning provided by an education and training institution. While national practices certainly differ, international definitions recommend that at least half of apprenticeship training should be carried out in the workplace (Council of the European Union 2018, 4).⁴

While in reality different types of apprenticeships respond to different requirements and pursue different purposes, they are too often perceived as a one-size-fits-all arrangement, and even when leading to the same qualification are often seen as inferior to classroom-based programs due to the lack of social recognition (this has been dealt with in the the ILO’s ADULT project forthcoming publication titled “Improving the attractiveness and social perception of apprenticeships”). However, considering their diversity, apprenticeships can be an effective solution to the widening skill demands in the workplaces of the future. Through combining on-the-job training, work experience and off-the-job learning, apprenticeships have a greater potential to keep pace with actual and future skills needs in enterprises as compared to conventional academic paths.

Depending on the purpose of reskilling or upskilling, the extent of transferrable (portable) skills, and the extent of RPL that is essential for any adult apprenticeship policy (see also section 3.3), roughly four target groups of adult apprenticeships can be distinguished, as shown in table 1 and discussed further below.

While such a typology may look arbitrary and artificial given the diverse types of apprenticeships, it could be helpful in conceptualizing target groups and the interests of employers and individuals when designing apprenticeship programmes and developing public support measures. For instance, when targeting migrant workers with an apprenticeship programme, it is essential to distinguish whether they are in employment or not and whether the programme can build on existing skills or not. Also, it may be helpful when distinguishing the needs of people in their early and middle adulthood (see further below).



⁴ For a comparison of this threshold of apprenticeship schemes in Europe, see Cedefop (2021).



Table 1. Target groups for adult apprenticeships according to the purpose of training, the beneficiaries' level of transferrable skills and the extent of RPL

| Extent to which skills are transferrable and recognized | Reskilling | Upskilling |
|--|---|--|
| No recognition, attending the full apprenticeship programme/low level of transferrable skills | Type A: Apprenticeships for reskilling Target groups: Early school leavers, unemployed and redundant employees (with low levels of transferrable skills) | Type C: 'Apprenticeships for Upskilling' Target groups: Incumbent low-skilled employees who need to upgrade their skills and/or want to change jobs with the same employer |
| Full or partial recognition/ high level of transferrable skills | Type B: Shortened apprenticeship Target groups: University/college graduates and people with work experience or a vocational qualification in a field different from the apprenticeship they aim for (with high levels of transferrable skills) | Type D: Conversion Target groups: Incumbent employees with extensive work experience who wish to get their skills recognized and/or advance their careers |

Source: Authors

Note: Please note that in practice distinguishing between reskilling and upskilling can be difficult (see also footnote 1).

Adults with low levels of (transferrable) skills and unemployed or early school leavers, despite having different needs, often find themselves in the same situation as young people who would like to do an apprenticeship. They face the choice of finding the right apprenticeship programme and an apprenticeship place (Type A). This is also the case for college and university graduates (or dropouts), and for people with work experience or a vocational qualification in a field different from the apprenticeship they aim for. However, people in this latter group usually get some of their experience recognized and can take on a shortened apprenticeship (Type B). A different situation arises if incumbent employees want or need to upgrade their skills by doing an apprenticeship (Type C).⁵ In these cases, the type of apprenticeship largely depends on the extent of training investment the employer is willing to provide (see also Chapter 2). If existing skills are merely "converted" to a VET qualification, research speaks of "conversion" (Type D) (Fuller and Unwin 2012, 8).

⁵ To be distinguished from upskilling of apprenticeship graduates, such as training for master craftsmen.



► 2.3 Formal vs informal apprenticeships

Formal apprenticeships can be set apart from other approaches of work-based non-formal and informal learning, as the former lead to the award of a recognized vocational qualification and the latter don't. However, there are also other criteria that are used to distinguish between formal and more informal variants of apprenticeships.

The ILO clearly differentiates between regulated apprenticeships in industrialized countries and informal apprenticeships – which are purely workplace-based, for which apprenticeship agreements are mostly oral, and through which no formal qualifications are acquired (ILO and the World Bank 2013). The informal apprenticeship model is a common approach for many countries in Africa, Asia, and South America with a dominant informal economy and with mainly micro and small enterprises (Gessler 2019, 682).

However, it must be noted that informal apprenticeships are not limited to those regions. In high-income countries, informal apprenticeships, in terms of longer periods of structured on-the-job learning guided by experienced older workers, are also quite common. Both in smaller organizations that can either not afford external training programmes or for which no adequate training provisions are available due to their specialization, as well as in larger corporations that run their own informal “apprenticeship programmes”.⁶

⁶ Compare for instance the concept of “non-registered” apprenticeships in the US. Non-registered apprenticeship refers to any apprenticeship or internship program that is not formally registered with the US Department of Labor. These programs may be paid or unpaid and may or may not lead to a certificate or job in the field (Jacoby and Lerman 2019).



► 2.4 Defining adult learner: The age issue

Although apprenticeships both for adults and for young people usually lead to the acquisition of the same vocational qualifications, it is appropriate to distinguish between them as they may differ in many other aspects, such as the structure of programmes, the learning approaches, the flexibility of learning pathways, the remuneration and the social security contributions. Above all, age limits are a common practice to regulate access to adult apprenticeship programmes or specific funding for adults doing apprenticeships (see table 2).

However, determining the minimum and maximum age for accessing education programmes or different educational levels is not specific to apprenticeships and needs to be seen in the broader historical context as a means for policymakers to manage societies. Further, across the globe, societies differ greatly with regard to the flexibility of age norms for various key life events, such as finishing education, becoming independent, getting married or entering parenthood. Hence, while statistics and empirical literature on adult education mostly defines adult learners as being above a traditional college-going age (often age 25), this remains a “flawed measure” (Kosyakova and Bills 2021, 3).

The age cut-off is historically and geographically contingent, and in many societies, entering an apprenticeship was regarded as appropriate only for young people for much of the 20th century and even today. Indeed, the age cut-off is deep-seated in cultures as diverse as Central Europe, where the young-person paradigm model of apprenticeship (Gessler 2019) echoes the distant past of the guild system, and India, where it lives on in the gurukul tradition (Bhurtel 2012).⁷ However, it also needs to be noted that the average starting age for an apprenticeship has increased in almost all countries (further details in section 1.2).

⁷ At the international level, the young-person paradigm model was reflected in a 1939 definition by the International Labour Organization where an apprenticeship was defined as “any system by which an employer undertakes by contract to employ a young person and to train him [or her] or have him [or her] trained systematically for a trade for the duration which has been fixed in advance and in the course of which the apprentice is bound to work in the employer’s service” (ILO 1939, quoted from ILO 2012, 2). By the time of the ILO’s 1962 definition, the term “young person” had been abolished.

Table 2. Examples for age thresholds in national definitions of, specific funding arrangements for, and eligibility for adult apprenticeship training⁸

In **Australia**, an adult apprentice is anyone **over the age of 21**.

In **Denmark**, people **above 25 years** have access to VET programmes (*Erhvervsuddannelser for Voksne [VET for adults], EUV*) designed especially for adults on the basis of RPL and relevant work experience, which leads to the same vocational qualifications.

In **France**, the apprenticeship system (*contrat d'apprentissage*) was reformed in 2018. One of the major objectives was to increase the age limit for starting an apprenticeship from **26 to 30 years**, guaranteeing people at this age the same wage as the statutory minimum for people over 26.⁹

In **Germany**, age constitutes no legal barrier to entering apprenticeship although apprenticeships for adults 25 and older used to be rare. The *Zukunftsstarter* initiative promotes apprenticeships among **adults aged 25 to 35**, addressing skills shortages and a lack of young apprentices in some sectors.¹⁰

In the following countries, apprenticeship programmes are open to people of all ages and there is no upper age limit: **Austria, Cambodia, Canada, China, Colombia, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Egypt, India, Jamaica, the Republic of Korea, Malawi, Senegal, South Africa, Switzerland, the United Republic of Tanzania, Turkey, the United Kingdom, and the United States.**¹¹

Source: Authors

Adulthood used to be defined by leaving initial education (including youth-centred apprenticeship) and moving on to gainful work, earning enough to establish one's financial independence and start a household. However, the transition to independence is not linked to biological age but mainly reflects institutional arrangements, with huge differences in "youth transition systems" across the globe and even within the rich societies of Europe (Walther, Stauber and Pohl 2013; Eurofound 2014). Due to prolonged adolescence, longer stays in education and postponed transitions to work (be they for structural or individual reasons), people in their late twenties and early thirties today often display little difference from young school leavers from the point of view of employers. They may both lack work experience. On the other hand, very young people, in particular in poor countries or war regions, often take on family responsibilities by supervising younger siblings, have refugee and migration experience, and must be independent and mature at an early age.

Hence, age as such is a poor marker of adulthood, and instead, as Gessler argues, "An adequate and non-discriminatory framing of the concept of apprenticeship would focus on the difference in expertise between a learner and a trainer, mentor, supervisor, or instructor" (Gessler 2019, 693). There are various reasons why chronological age can only serve as a proxy and why other dimensions are equally important to describing adult apprenticeships as we understand them here, for instance, the maturity or

⁸ We use the terms apprenticeship programme and apprenticeship scheme synonymously, and often simply refer to the country. In case different schemes are in place in a country, we specify the scheme in the text in brackets.

⁹ Frédéric Turlan, "France: Government unveils plans for reform of apprenticeship system", Eurofund, 22 March 2018.

¹⁰ Cedefop, Apprenticeships for Adults, June 2020.

¹¹ ILO, Apprenticeships at a Glance, forthcoming.



extent of work and life experience, the motivation for doing an apprenticeship, and the extent of prior learning. Erikson's stages of psychosocial development, which distinguish between early adulthood and middle adulthood, may be a way forward in this respect, but would need further fine-tuning and better consideration of different cultural contexts.¹²

It is important to note that, depending on the specific national or regional context, there can be discriminating factors other than age. For instance, due to the history of apartheid, the issue of ethnicity in South Africa is particularly contested – for example, apprenticeships used to be a white-dominated model of learning (Kraak 2008; van Rensburg et al. 2012).

To conclude, chronological (or even biological) age is of little help in identifying adult apprenticeship, which poses a considerable challenge to any comparative work across countries. Nevertheless, apprenticeships for young people differ essentially from apprenticeship schemes for adults. The former need to place more emphasis on the needs of socialization during adolescence, the acquisition of soft and personal skills, and cooperation with parents. Further, minor apprentices enjoy particular legal protections. Frameworks for adult apprenticeships, in contrast, need to provide remuneration in line with productive work and an income (remuneration and public support) high enough to cover the living costs of a person no longer supported by family or eventually even feeding a family. Related aspects are discussed in detail in section 2.2.

¹² We do not consider issues of late adulthood (65 and above) in this report.



► 2.5 Research and data on adult apprenticeship

Comparative research on adult apprenticeships is very limited. In fact, there is only one such recently published study, which was commissioned by Cedefop (2019). The study is explorative by nature and covers only Australia beyond Europe. Besides providing examples of adult apprenticeships, the study points out two general interesting findings. Firstly, “Apprenticeship for adults is [...] not perceived, at least in existing literature, as a separate type of apprenticeship” (Cedefop 2019, 9), and secondly, “age is not a conclusive factor in distinguishing apprenticeship for young people from apprenticeship for adults” (Cedefop 2019, 10). It argues that the term “adults” is often interpreted in a broad sense as persons who have left initial education and entered the labour market as employees or unemployed persons, but there is no consistency in the delimitation between young people and adults (Cedefop 2019).

Despite the abundance of comparative studies on apprenticeships that have been produced within the last 10 years, very little is known about the role of adults in apprenticeships (compare for instance Cedefop 2019; Chankseliani, Keep and Wilde 2017; European Commission 2013; Smith and Kemmis 2013; and Fazio, Fernández-Coto and Ripani 2016). Smith and Kemmis (2013) distinguish between national apprenticeship systems in terms of the extent to which they target youth or adults, but without further scrutinizing the issue of age or questioning why countries differ in this respect (see also section 2.2). None of these studies address the topic systematically, and consequently there are only isolated references to the role of adults or topics relevant for adult apprenticeship. For example, ILO (2020), Cedefop (2019) and OECD (2018) refer to accelerated completion by RPL and direct access to final qualifying exams; Chankseliani and Anuar

(2019) refer to incentives for employers; and OECD (2018) and Chankseliani, Keep and Wilde (2017) refer to differences in remuneration between young people and adult.

Even when it comes to capturing adult apprenticeships in single countries, literature is still scarce. England and Australia are the only countries where this seems to have been a research topic at all (see below). Presumably, this is because adult apprenticeship programmes in these countries are strongly government-funded, meaning that they are used as instruments of public policy and further monitoring, quality assurance and critical review by independent researchers.

Karmel (2006) studied older workers (45 years and over) in Australian apprenticeships and traineeships between 1997 and 2003, finding that the number of apprentices and trainees has increased substantially since the early 1980s, with the majority of growth taking place in “non-traditional” occupations. The largest percentage increase was for males over the age of 45 years. Sandelands et al. (2009) explored adult apprenticeships as a means to overcome skills shortages in the Australian construction industry. They found that adult apprentices with previous experience can be more productive and loyal and, due to their maturity, require less supervision.

Two authors who have come back repeatedly to elaborate on adult apprenticeships are Lorna Unwin and Alison Fuller. In their commentary for the UK’s Economic and Social Research Council on “Expansive Apprenticeship” (Fuller and Unwin 2008), they promote adult apprenticeships while at the same time warning of the trend of simply converting existing workers into apprentices to increase their numbers with qualifications (a trend eventually aggravated by the new levy system; see also section 2.1). In later works, and based on additional empirical evidence (qualitative interviews with adult apprentices), they contend that in England, apprenticeship has become an “adult” programme. By using Freeman’s concept of chrononormativity, they explore the significant disjuncture existing between the “imagined” age (we referred to this as the young-person paradigm above) and the identity of an apprentice, and the actual constitution of the apprenticeship workforce in the UK (Fuller and Unwin 2012; Fuller et al. 2015; Leonard, Fuller and Unwin 2018). Among other things, they conclude that unless the diversities of age and ageing by those pursuing non-standard pathways are recognized, the opportunities offered through adult apprenticeships cannot be fully realized. They recommend that those involved in selecting and training apprentices should be trained in diversity awareness, including also recognition of previous experience and diverse lifestyles and responsibilities (Leonard, Fuller and Unwin 2018).

While the scarcity of research on adult apprenticeships is a problem of its own, a key challenge for our work was that information on adult apprenticeships is unevenly distributed across countries. For instance, examples were easier to track for European countries, Australia, Canada and the United States, and by contrast, very difficult to find for countries from other world regions, particularly low- and middle-income countries. This certainly relates to differences in research infrastructure and traditions, but it may also reflect the fact that while the aging of population is a trend observed in the majority of high-income countries (such as EU countries, Australia, Canada and the United States), low- and middle-income countries (for example, Egypt, India and South Africa) have larger youth populations as a proportion of the total population and don’t consider adult apprenticeships as a pressing policy issue.¹³ Available in-depth discussion of those countries’ apprenticeship systems provides only accidental information on the accessibility of apprenticeship schemes for adults, specific schemes for adults, available support structures and subsidies for adults, and the number and composition of adult apprentices.

Another limitation for research on adult apprenticeships is that adult apprenticeships are not mirrored in the register-based education statistics (UOE). Comparable apprenticeship data internationally is difficult to access, as the terms used “to define and refer to apprenticeship can disguise actual apprenticeship

¹³ While we advocate here for apprenticeship as a special means for reskilling and upskilling of adults, we don’t want to undermine the importance of youth apprenticeship and short-term training measures to tackle issues of unemployment.

activity under a different name and vice versa” (Chankseliani, Keep and Wilde 2017, 18).¹⁴ Further, the age range of eligibility for apprentices, both young people and adults, varies between countries, which leads to difficulties in data interpretation. Nevertheless, we can say for sure that for all countries for which we have accessed national data, the overall share of adults and the average age of apprentices has increased over the last two decades.¹⁵

Besides research focusing primarily on adult apprenticeship and research looking at apprenticeships in general, there is another relevant strand of research that is worth looking at: comparative research on formal adult education. This research considers apprenticeships for adults as a particular form of formal adult education and takes as starting point the efforts and the support needed “to climb one rung on the educational ladder” from the learner’s, organization’s and government’s points of view (Saar and Ure 2013; Hefler 2013; Hefler and Markowitsch 2010).

For the adult learner, apprenticeship training, like any other formal adult education, represents a significant learning endeavour, requiring high levels of motivation and significant investment of time and often money. This is why online and distance learning at “open universities” and short courses at adult learning centres may suit the immediate training needs of adult learners better. However, apprenticeships often enable more sustainable career changes and typically mark a “life event”, with adults distinguishing the time prior to and after participation.

For an organization, apprenticeship training represents an investment in its personnel, often linked to long-term development plans, in particular where wages for learners are close to the wages of regular (unskilled) workers and public incentives are absent or insignificant.

For public policymakers, a key question is how a sufficiently high-esteem programme of adult apprenticeships can be achieved. In countries where apprenticeships in initial education enjoy high esteem, adult programmes can try to take part in these established patterns. When the apprenticeship model lacks social recognition, programmes need to establish other sources of social recognition (for example, by developing links to the higher education sector or by demonstrating the professional excellence of their adult apprentices). As with all programmes of formal adult education, it is of key importance how social recognition – the “social charter” (Meyer 1970) – of a programme can be achieved, thereby finding a programme’s place within the stratification order established by educational credentials, as the latter is of equal importance for the success of an approach as the skills and competences acquired by the learners (Di Stasio, Bol and Van de Werfhorst 2016).

Finally, it has to be noted that the rich tradition of research into adult education and lifelong learning offers a practically inexhaustible source of ideas and approaches that can also be used for developing policies and practices of adult apprenticeship. Considering the abundance of research activities in this field, it is striking that so little research addresses adult apprenticeships explicitly. To name just two examples, neither does the voluminous Handbook of Lifelong Learning (Aspin et al. 2012) mention “adult apprenticeships”, nor did any of the several hundred contributions presented recently at an international adult research conference “Adult Education in Global Times”¹⁶ deal with this topic.

¹⁴ For a discussion on data on apprenticeships in Europe, see Cedefop (2021).

¹⁵ This is certainly the case in the UK, the US, Canada, Australia, Germany, France, Denmark and South Africa. (see also Jeon 2019).

¹⁶ University of British Columbia, Adult Education in Global Times: An International Research Conference (AEGT2021).

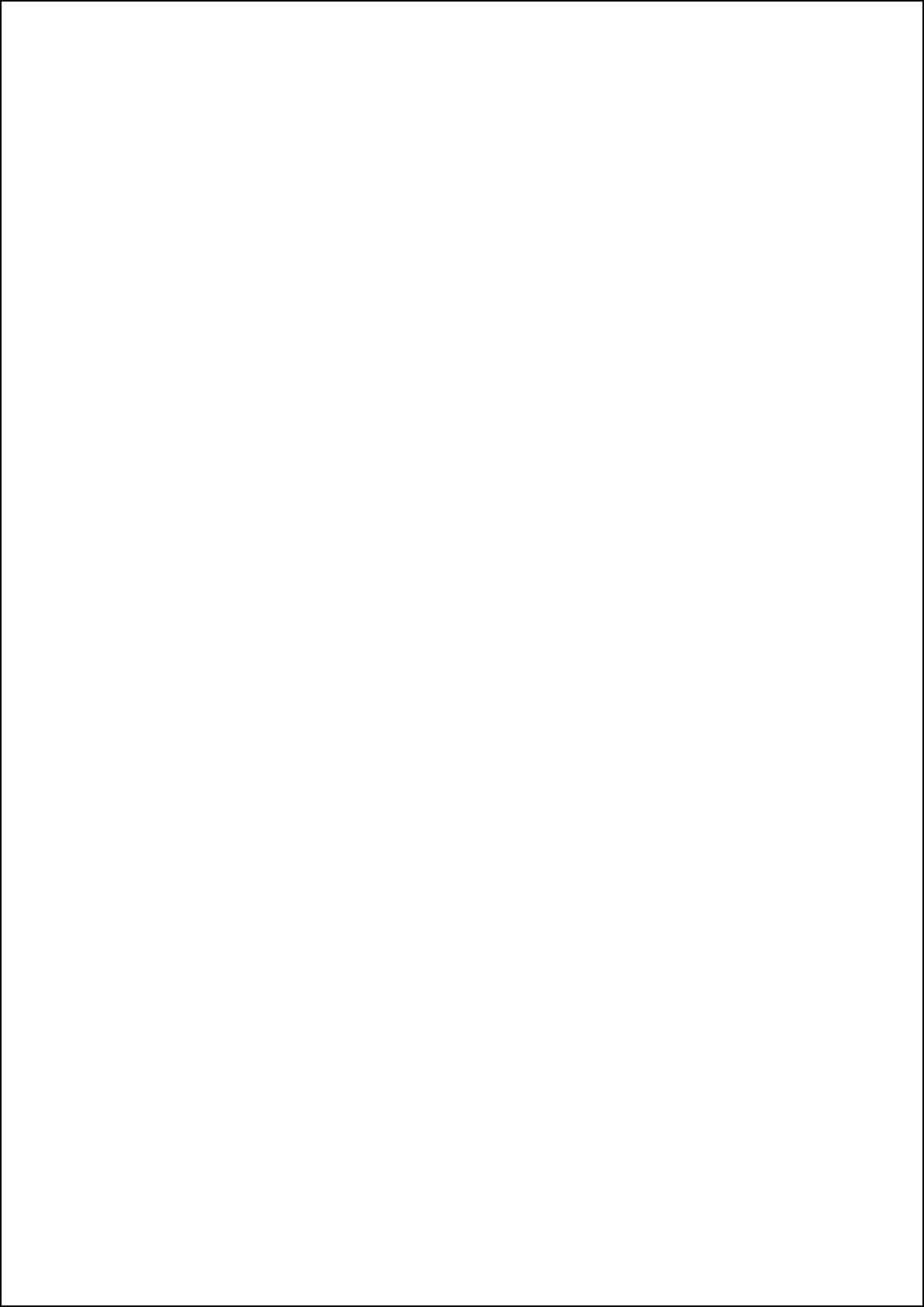
Chapter 1. Lessons learned and key messages

There is a growing need to reshape apprenticeships towards lifelong learning due to increasing economic upheavals, the shift towards green economies, extended phases of late adolescence, diversified and less linear career pathways, and, in particular in high-income countries, the ageing of societies.

For sustainable career changes, i.e., change of occupation, moving up corporate hierarchies or becoming self-employed, apprenticeships and master craftsperson training may be more viable options than exclusively short, non-formal courses or informal learning at the workplace.

Age is only one proxy for defining adult apprenticeship. The particular life situations and experiences of learners, their motivations and maturity as well their prior knowledge and qualifications are most important for determining the differences between youth and adult apprenticeships. In addition, age norms differ between countries, and there are huge differences in the age distribution between high- and low-income countries.

Comparative research on adult apprenticeship is scarce, and more is needed to provide insights into the effectiveness of financial measures to support adults and in particular into ways to turn restrictive apprenticeships into expansive ones. International data on enrolment in work-based learning (WBL) should allow distinguishing between age groups.





3

**Patterns of
provision
of adult
apprenticeships**

Patterns of provision of adult apprenticeships

▶ 3.1 Forms of adult apprenticeships, their position within the system of education and links to the labour market

Although often viewed as limited to low-skilled adults, reskilling and upskilling concerns all skills levels. As a matter of fact, adult apprenticeships exist at practically every level of education (see table 3 below).

Apprenticeships for adults can be offered as a form of elementary vocational education equivalent to primary or lower secondary education. They are addressed to early school leavers who have not successfully completed upper secondary education. Moreover, migrants might rely on the very same programmes due to their low proficiency in the locally dominant language, even in the cases where they have achieved a higher level of formal education in their country of origin. Forms of apprenticeship at the elementary level therefore often address vulnerable groups of adults with no or restricted access to paid labour beyond the most precarious forms of jobs. Their provision is thereby often routed within the fields of active labour market and social policies. Examples of such programmes are the “skilled worker intensive courses” (FacharbeiterInnen-intensivausbildung) in Austria and the on-the-job trade certificate programme in Norway (see also table 3). Many apprenticeships at level 2 in the UK (for example, adult care worker, animal care assistant, golf greenkeeper and optical assistant) can be considered to be of this type.

Alternatively, apprenticeships can be established as a form of upper secondary or post-secondary education. By completion of the apprenticeship, the education goals of upper secondary education are achieved, so general (academic) and vocational aims are combined, although to varying degrees. Apprenticeship programmes might or might not grant higher education entrance permission. Alternatively, for learners following programmes without higher education entrance permission, add-on or bridging programmes might be available, strengthening the academic component and thereby granting access to universities. Finnish Apprenticeships and the Austrian Programme Lehre mit Matura, which combine apprenticeships with courses to gain higher school certificates, would fall into this category (see table 3).

Apprenticeships may also form a type of post-secondary education, taking in mainly or exclusively graduates from general upper-secondary education and relying on advanced levels of academic skills (for example, with regard to skills in mathematics) and the ability to absorb large quantities of learning material. In short, the demands placed on the learner might not be very different from the first circle of higher education. As the completion of general upper secondary education is the formal or de facto access requirement, these types of “higher apprenticeship” form – and are often marketed as – a valid

alternative to higher education. An example is the specialist vocational qualifications in Finland, which can be acquired through apprenticeship training (see table 3). Holders of specialist vocational qualifications are typically adults in employment with an initial vocational education and training (IVET) qualification, who have vocational skills that meet work needs and that are highly advanced or multidisciplinary.¹⁷

Finally, further levels of post-secondary and practically any level of higher education might be organized in the form of apprenticeships such as graduate and higher apprenticeships in England and Scotland, or South African Learnerships at higher national qualifications framework (NQF) levels (see table 3 and ILO publication on ADULT paper: Report on Digital Transformation of Apprenticeships: Emerging Opportunities and Barriers). The latter might draw on varied traditions where enterprises employ students on a permanent basis and support them in various ways up to graduation while the latter commit themselves to staying with the enterprise for a defined number of years after the program or accept payback clauses. Traditions of corporate universities, where internal training programmes of firms have been further developed into programmes comparable to higher education studies, might also form a source for apprenticeships at higher education levels. Higher (education) apprenticeships have recently gained more momentum, but it is difficult to say what role they will play in the future (see also the discussion of different scenarios in Chapter 3).

Table 3. Examples of apprenticeship schemes accessible to or targeted at adults and related regulations across world regions

| Country | Level ⁱ | Duration ⁱⁱ |
|---|------------------------------|---|
| In Austria, apprenticeship-intensive courses (FacharbeiterInnen-Intensivausbildung) are available for various apprenticeship areas. These enable adults with low levels of qualifications and work experience to complete a recognized vocational qualification within a shorter period than that required for regular apprenticeship programmes. | Intermediary 3-4 | 12-36 months (shortened by 12 months) |
| In Australia, there are no specific apprenticeships just for adults. However, there are differences for adult apprentices and their employers around areas such as wages and financial incentives. An adult apprentice is anyone over the age of 21 (earlier 25). ¹⁸ | Intermediary and Advanced | 24-36 months |
| The median age of apprentices in Canada is 27-30 years. Individuals with prior experience or learning can apply to the apprenticeship authority for validation of their prior learning, although not all schemes allow this (ILO & World Bank 2013). | Depends on the province | 24-60 months |
| In England, adult apprenticeships are highly individualized, and the training takes into account the apprentices' prior experience and existing skills. | Intermediary and Advanced | 12-60 months |

¹⁷ Cedefop, "Vocational education and training in Europe – Finland", April 2019.

¹⁸ Employers taking on an adult apprentice may be eligible to receive the Support for Adult Australian Apprentices incentive if the age of the adult apprentice is: 21 years or over when they start their apprenticeship on or after the 01 July 2019; 25 years or over when they start their apprenticeship prior to 01 July 2019.

Table 3. Examples of apprenticeship schemes accessible to or targeted at adults and related regulations across world regions

| Country | Level ⁱ | Duration ⁱⁱ |
|--|-------------------------------|--|
| In Germany, adults aged 21 or more may have the overall duration of their apprenticeships reduced. Those with a secondary qualification (Mittlere Reife) can obtain a reduction of six months. Those with a general upper-secondary school-leaving exam, adults aged 21 and above, and those already holding a vocational qualification may obtain a 12-month reduction (OECD 2018). | Intermediary | 12–32 months (shortened by 12 months) |
| In Finland, any formal VET qualification can be acquired through apprenticeship training, which is based on the requirements for the relevant qualification, according to which the learner's personal training plan is prepared. | Intermediary and Advanced | Depends on learner's individual learning plan |
| In Norway, within the on-the-job trade certificate programme (fagbrev på job), employees without a formal education relevant to their work can obtain a trade certificate while in employment. Participants are exempted from the common core subjects of the national (upper secondary) curriculum. | Intermediary | Depends on the model, 12–36 months with the employer |
| In Scotland, besides Foundation Apprenticeships for pupils in secondary school, there are Modern Apprenticeships and Graduate Apprenticeships. For Modern Apprenticeships, which are primarily aimed at individuals aged 16 to 24, funding is limited to this age group. There is no age limit for funding graduate apprenticeships. | Basic, Intermediary, Advanced | Depending on qualification |
| South Africa has an elaborate system of recognizing prior learning for adult artisans. Eligible candidates must have at least three years of relevant work experience (see details in Case Study B). | Intermediary | 36–48 months, shortened by RPL to 18 months |
| In Sweden, apprenticeships for adults aged 20 and above (lärlings-utbildning för vuxna) can be arranged within the system of municipal adult education (komvux). The target group includes also immigrants. | Intermediary | Depends on the individual study plan and RPL |
| In Switzerland, shortened apprenticeship training (apprentissage raccourci / Verkürzte berufliche Grundbildung) is available for adults who already have a first degree or previous knowledge in a specific profession (SBFI 2015). | Intermediary | 24–36 months (shortened by 12 months) |
| U.S. apprenticeships generally reach employees in their mid to late 20s. All apprentices are employees and are paid wages, which increase as the apprentice makes progress and learns skills (ILO & World Bank 2013). | Intermediary and Advanced | 36–48 months |

Source: Authors

Notes: (i) The definitions used are as follows: intermediary equals European Qualifications Framework (EQF) level 3–4 or International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) level 3–4, advanced any level above EQF and ISCED level 4. (ii) Duration refers to the minimum and maximum duration of the apprenticeship programme for adult learners. For instance, in Germany apprenticeships, depending on the occupation, usually last 24 to 42 months but can be shortened for adults by 12 months. However, it has to be noted that besides general rules to shorten the duration of apprenticeship for adults, individual forms of RPL may further reduce the duration, recognize the qualification as a whole based on prior learning or experience, or allow for direct access to final apprenticeship exams without attending any programme.

¹⁹ This is an estimation based on an interview. RPL is a complex process and depends on the individual case.



Countries differ sharply in regard to the presence of apprenticeships for adults at various levels and their role vis-à-vis the labour market. Apprenticeships for adults may be established only at one particular level of education. Alternatively, countries may have a variety of adult apprenticeships positioned at different educational levels. Speaking of differences, issues of social stratification, job quality and segregation need to be mentioned, and these apply to youth and adult apprenticeships alike.

Depending on their level within the hierarchy of education programmes, apprenticeships in general differ not only by their duration, content, share of workplace component, and access requirements, but also by the range and hierarchical levels of job positions they prepare the learner for. Even when positioned on the same International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) level, programmes may differ greatly. While some programmes might provide access to decent jobs with above-average wages, others may provide access only to more disadvantaged jobs in low-wage sectors. Apprenticeships in technical occupations (for example, mechatronics) are typically more demanding and offer better job prospects than apprenticeships in the service sector, for example, in retail. Also, the prestige of the company plays a key role (this idea has been dealt with in the ILO's ADULT project's forthcoming publication titled "Improving the attractiveness and social perception of apprenticeship"). Attractive employers might not only invest more resources in supporting apprentices but may also provide access to internal labour markets with attractive career pathways available only to former apprentices. Hence, differences between apprenticeships exist not only between levels, sectors and occupations, but also within the same occupation, between companies.

This horizontal stratification, which can also be demonstrated in highly standardized, high-quality dual systems, such as the Swiss and German ones, is often disregarded in political debates and ignored or underestimated when it comes to policy transfer. It is a particular challenge in low-income countries with large informal economies and where factors other than economics may further exacerbate stratification (for example, gender, ethnicity, religious denomination).

In this context, the "long arm of the occupation", i.e. the continued strong intertwining of apprenticeships and occupations, and the quality of jobs must not be forgotten. As Gamble (2021, 256) impressively shows, based on a detailed analysis of baking, boat building and film production in South Africa, each domain, in its own way, "values a craft model based on all-round expertise and control of work from start to finish". A single designated person called a baker hardly exists any longer – instead there are industrial bakers, retail bakers, informal bakers, craft bakers, etc. – and "yet the occupational identity of bakers continues to dominate the sector, with craft bakers as 'gold standard'" (Gamble 2021). Her findings show



the continued strong identification with “whole” occupations despite the increasing fragmentation, pluralization and precarization of work observable in the digital era, as for instance evidenced by the rise of platform-mediated gig work (Bhutani and Sawchuk forthcoming) or creative industries (Morgan and Nelligan 2018). These findings not only point to the potential limits of flexibilization and modularization of vocational training, they also underline the importance of organizing work and workplaces in such a way that expertise and professional identities can be formed. Hence, decent jobs²⁰ are a precondition for quality apprenticeships.

Finally, gender segregation is stronger in apprenticeship training than in other educational provisions, replicating occupational gender segregation. In particular, occupations in the skilled trades/crafts are highly segregated (Bridges et al. 2020; Simon and Clarke 2016). Hence, statistics on the share of female apprentices always need to be analysed on the level of occupation and/or sector, as the overall figures conceal gender segregation. For instance, in the UK, the numbers of women and men starting apprenticeships were almost at the same level in 2019/2020, while in Switzerland there were more men starting apprenticeships. But in both countries, this simply reflects the structure of apprenticeship occupations, and in both countries, women are over-represented in healthcare, social service, retail and business administration while they are under-represented in (better paid) technical trades. Also, in Korea, 75 per cent of apprentices are male, and this can again be explained by the fact that most apprenticeships are concentrated in technical areas such as machinery, electronics and IT (KRIVET 2020). Certainly, gender inequality is stronger in poor countries (Jayachandran 2015) and heavily depends on culture.

In addition, exploitation, precarious work and gender inequality in apprenticeships should be a major concern for trade unions globally, and there are good national examples (unionlearn 2018) that international activities can build on to tackle these issues.

²⁰ See also the ILO’s work on job quality and decent work.

▶ 3.2 Patterns of provision of adult apprenticeships: A cross-country and within-country comparative view

Adult access to apprenticeships cannot be discussed without acknowledging the current place of the apprenticeship model within a country's education system. With the overall institutional patterns in a country defining the proportion of young and old apprentices, a low proportion of adult apprenticeships must not be taken as a sign of a weak development of the adult apprenticeship system, as it might instead simply reflect the strong role of the apprenticeship model in initial education, with no immediate consequence to the provision of apprenticeship for adults. Vice versa, a high proportion of adult apprentices does not necessarily indicate an approach that is well adjusted to adult participants' needs; rather, it might be the effect of the lack of provision or attractiveness of apprenticeships for young people.

The following two contrasting country examples, Austria and Finland, should illustrate this relationship between educational system reforms and the age distribution of the apprenticeship system. Measured by the average age of apprentices, Austria probably has one of the youngest apprentice populations worldwide, while Finland has one of the oldest.

In Austria, apprentices are predominantly young people between 15 and 19, as "dual education" represents a key pillar of Austria's system of upper secondary education, with about 40 per cent of the cohort taking the apprenticeship route. The characteristics of the system are a result of reforms to vocational education undertaken in 1969, enshrining the distribution of tasks between the state (running and funding the vocational schools) and private enterprises (providing work-based training and opportunities for productive work). The expansion, however, of school-based upper secondary education, both general and vocational, since the 1970s, left its mark on the apprenticeship system. Until as recently as 2008, adults were not admitted to vocational schools, and were thus effectively excluded from regular apprenticeships. Forms of apprenticeships for adults needed to use various "loopholes" in the regulations to establish provisions outside the regular system. Until today, the majority of adults in Austria take part in special arrangements (shortened apprenticeships without attending vocational schools), and only a minority use the now open general pathways for accomplishing an apprenticeship.

The majority of Finnish apprentices are between 30 and 40 years old, and there are more apprentices among people above 50 years of age than there are among the younger cohort (see Case Study A on Finland for details). After World War II, Finland was in favour of a classroom-based VET to meet the growing demand for skilled labour and secure equal educational opportunities for all. Following the Vocational Institutions Act of 1958, numerous municipal vocational schools were founded and became symbols of equality and of the progress of modern industry, while the apprenticeship system deteriorated. The number of apprentices compared to students in full-time VET school declined significantly between the 1960s and the 1980s. Apprenticeships were thought to be particularly appropriate as an alternative for those who had not applied to or been accepted for the school-based VET, been affected by "restructuring problems", and "unwilling students" and other marginal groups. Between 1981 and 1993, the share of under-20-year-old new apprenticeship entrants decreased from over 50 per cent to less than a few percent, comparable to today's levels.

The share of adult apprenticeships within a country cannot be used to draw direct conclusions about the quality of that country's provisions. For instance, the Finnish apprenticeship track is criticized by Finnish researchers for various reasons (see Case Study A for details). In contrast, in Austria, the expansion and development of opportunities to catch up on apprenticeship qualifications are commented on largely positively (Hefler and Steinheimer 2020). Hence, to compare the quality of adult apprenticeships in these two countries, other measures would be necessary, such as the relative share of applicants, satisfaction with the programme, learning achievements and labour market outcomes.

Also, Chankseliani, Keep and Wilde (2017) point to several contextual factors, such as countries' demographic situations, economic developments, specific regulations and cultural-historic developments (including traditions of apprenticeship), that affect apprenticeship provision, alongside the availability of apprenticeships to adults. However, the authors do not provide any details about the way those aspects affect the provision of adult apprenticeships. We turn to this issue in the following paragraphs and begin by describing the differences among countries in terms of the age distribution within the apprentice population. Next, we try to explain these patterns by linking apprenticeships to employment structures and skill formation systems. The summary of this discussion, which essentially distinguishes between three groups of countries, is presented in table 4.

In the first group of countries, the apprenticeship demographics of Austria, Germany and Switzerland, which all have strong apprenticeship systems, are still quantitatively dominated by young people who have just finished compulsory schooling. In particular in Austria and Switzerland, the average age of starting an apprenticeship is very low (16 to 17 years old), although it has increased slightly over the last two decades. In Germany, apprentices are predominantly young people between 16 and 19, however, for the 18/19-year-old graduates of academic upper secondary education, there has also been a long-standing tradition of completing an apprenticeship first (in particularly demanding fields such as banking and insurance or the health sector) as a "safety net" prior to entering higher education (Shavit and Müller 2000). In Germany, the overall age of apprenticeship rose from 18 years in 1993 to about 20 years in 2016 (BIBB 2018; Pätzold and Brendebach 2020), and university dropouts are increasingly competing for attractive apprenticeship places (Arusoğlu and Thielen 2017). The average starting age for an apprenticeship has increased in almost all countries due to extended years of schooling, later transitions to work, and patterns of migration delaying the completion of preparatory school-based education (Markowitsch and Hefler 2019).²¹

Still belonging to the first group but outside Europe, the apprenticeship systems of Egypt and India address predominantly young people (Smith and Kemmis 2013). In both countries, apprentices are mostly school leavers and the strength and popularity of the higher education route as well as informal apprenticeship models potentially limit the capacity of growth of formal apprenticeships (Chankseliani, Keep and Wilde 2017).

In the second group of countries, such as Australia, England, Denmark, Indonesia and South Africa (see table 4), apprenticeship is more balanced between younger and older age groups. In Denmark, the average age of apprentices has risen rapidly in recent years as the clientele and role of VET have changed significantly due to a declining interest in apprenticeships among young Danish school leavers and a growing number of adult migrants and refugees for whom the apprenticeship track has become the

Table 4. Apprenticeship population according to age

| | Country group | Approx. share of apprentices over 25 (%) | Countries |
|------|---|--|--|
| I. | Predominantly used by young people | < 33 | Austria, Switzerland, Germany, France, Norway, Spain, Egypt, India, Turkey |
| II. | Equally used by young people and adults | 33–66 | Denmark, England, Australia Indonesia, South Africa, Nigeria, Ghana, Republic of Korea |
| III. | Predominantly used by adults | > 66 | Ireland, Finland, Canada, United States |

Source: Based on Smith and Kemmis (2013), Jeon (2019), and own research

²¹For data on other EU countries, the Cedefop European database on apprenticeship schemes provides information about the average age of apprentices



most feasible option to obtain a qualification (Carstensen and Ibsen 2019). In Australia, the apprenticeship system allows for RPL, thus an increasing number of skilled adults are enrolling in apprenticeships – for example, typical apprentices in the country are people who lack formal qualifications (ILO and the World Bank 2013). The percentage of apprentices aged 25 years and older has increased compared with younger apprentices in Australia since 1996. Between 1996 and 2018, adult apprentices who commenced in a non-trade²² increased from 22 per cent to 39 per cent, while adult apprentices who commenced in a trade increased from 8 per cent to 22 per cent (Hargreaves, Stanwick, and Skujins 2017).

In a third group of countries (Canada, Finland and the United States), apprentices are predominantly adults. In Canada and the United States, apprentices aged 25 and over are typically employees and their shares are 80 per cent and 95 per cent respectively of all apprentices (ILO and World Bank 2013). In Finland, apprentices aged under 19 years old made up less than 6 per cent and those between 20 and 24 only 10 per cent of all apprentices in 2018 (see Case Study A for details).

Obviously, and as stated in the previous section (3.1.), countries can differ strongly regarding the types of provisions of adult apprenticeship, their functions and their roles within the employment system – apart from the structure of the economy, which is of course also decisive. There are different but related theories at hand to shed light on these differences, each of which emphasizes particular aspects.

From an educational-historical or sociological perspective (Brinton 2005; Greinert 2004; Blossfeld and Stockmann 1999; Shavit and Müller 1998), it is clear that for countries that have opted for egalitarian, comprehensive school systems (for example, Sweden) or banned any vocational training from initial education (for example, Ireland), apprenticeship training will always be predominantly for adults. Even a re-emphasis on VET and work-based learning in initial education, as in Finland, will hardly change this picture (see Case Study A). Likewise, in countries in which vocational training is mainly considered as on-the-job training (for example, the US), adults will form the majority in any apprenticeship training offered.²³

²²In Australia, a difference is made between trade apprenticeships in trade areas such as electrical, plumbing, construction, metal fabrication, printing, cooking etc. and non-trade areas (closer to traineeships) mainly in the services sector, such as retail, hospitality, care, administration, etc.

²³Winterton (2008) would classify the former as countries with a “school focus” and the latter as “market-regulated with workplace focus”, characterized by their tradition of voluntarism and weak legislation concerning the involvement of social partners in VET in contrast to those with a “state-regulated workplace focus” (e.g., Germany).

This reasoning can be complemented by an economic or industrial relations perspective, which claims that in liberal market economies (LMEs) the general education system, in particular the higher education system, provides generic human capital assets which can then be developed and shaped through on-the-job training in enterprises. In contrast, coordinated market economies (CMEs) emphasise vocational training in addition to higher education. Bosch and Charest (2008, 428) state slightly cynically in this respect that in CMEs, “the modernization of vocational training is seen as a contribution to innovation in the economy, while in LMEs, it is seen as a siding into which weaker pupils can conveniently be shunted”. Clearly, along with widespread recognition of and respect for apprenticeship qualifications, VET enjoys higher esteem in countries in which it opens up access to well-paid jobs and career opportunities than it does in countries with high shares of low-skill jobs, where it might signal that the vocational education graduate is a low achiever in the school system and possesses narrowly based skills for jobs (Bosch and Charest 2008).

This is further specified in the concept of the skill formation regime (Busemeyer and Trampusch 2012), which has its roots in political economy and the “varieties of capitalism” approach, and which is capable of distinguishing countries where youth apprenticeships are likely to be significant from countries where they are not. In so-called “collective” skill formation regimes, high public commitment for VET goes together with high participation of enterprises in training (for example, Germany), while in “state-centred” or “segmentalist regimes” only one of these two parameters is fulfilled, and in “liberal” regimes, none are. Hence, in “liberal” regimes we find both low public commitment and low enterprise involvement in VET. Conversely, one could argue that in liberal skills regimes with weak IVET systems, there is a huge demand for developing skills in adulthood, whereas in collective skill formation systems where dual IVET is strong, there is less demand for adult apprenticeship and youth apprenticeship will prevail. While this could be demonstrated for LMEs or liberal skills regimes, it doesn’t hold true for collective skills regimes, as a comparison of Denmark and Germany shows.

Both Denmark and Germany can be considered collective skills regimes and have strong dual VET systems, but there are big differences between the two with regards to the opportunities available for adult learners. In Germany, the training system is organized around a significant front-end investment but with very little adult continuing training. Continuing VET and participation in master craftsman courses is voluntary and depends on individual ambition and initiative. Crouch, Finegold and Sako (1999) argue that the German high-quality system for IVET may have contributed to the underdevelopment of training for adults. In contrast, Denmark has a well-institutionalized system for adult education that provides opportunities for skill development over the worker’s life course and has much higher participation rates of adult learning in both formal and non-formal settings.

Single theoretical approaches and country typologies are therefore only partially suitable for predicting the prevalence of adults in apprenticeship training, whereas the path dependency of the education system (i.e., the way education systems depend on past decisions) already explains a large part of the differences. These approaches are even less helpful when it comes to low- or medium-income countries, as they rarely fit the typologies developed for high-income countries (Ebenau 2012).²⁴ Based on a cluster analysis, Ahlborn and Schweickert (2019) claim that “most African and Latin American countries join the liberal OECD prototype economies in the world of inequality. On the other hand, a large proportion of Asian developing countries as well as all transition countries join the coordinated and liberal European market economies in the world of equality” (p. 1). Obviously, various strong disparities, particularly within low-income countries, such as differences between urban and rural areas, artisan and industrialized economies, and the digital divide make it difficult to transfer the above insights on the prevalence of adult apprentices from OECD

²⁴In fact, the typologies don’t even fit a large number of high-income countries, which becomes obvious when one tries, for instance, to classify all the countries in Europe.

countries to economically less developed countries. Also, it has to be acknowledged that some world regions, for instance, most African countries, have no clear policies on lifelong learning (Oketch 2012), as those countries' predominant preoccupation is realization of universal access to primary education and rapid transition to the secondary level. Also, it should be noted that Africa is the fastest growing and most youthful population (over 60 percent of the population is currently younger than 25 years), and youth (aged 15–24) unemployment and low literacy levels are still among the greatest challenges the continent faces.²⁵

Chapter 3. Lessons learned and key messages

In general, adult apprenticeships exist at practically all levels of education, from the basic levels to the advanced levels in higher education, address diverse target groups, from low-skilled migrants to higher education graduates, and fulfil various functions, from upskilling of workers to re-integrating the unemployed; however, provision of apprenticeships is often limited. In advanced countries, more diversity can be found, but in general, countries tend to limit apprenticeships to specific levels, learners and functions, and gender inequality remains a prevalent issue.

Over the centuries, apprenticeship training in industrialized countries has developed from child education (the beginning of apprenticeship) to youth training (the dominant model in the 20th century) to finally a training model for all age groups.

Even in countries where apprenticeships can be considered to be predominantly for youth (for example, Austria, Denmark and Germany), the average starting age of apprentices has risen in recent years due to extended years of schooling, later transitions to work and the inclusion of migrants in the system.

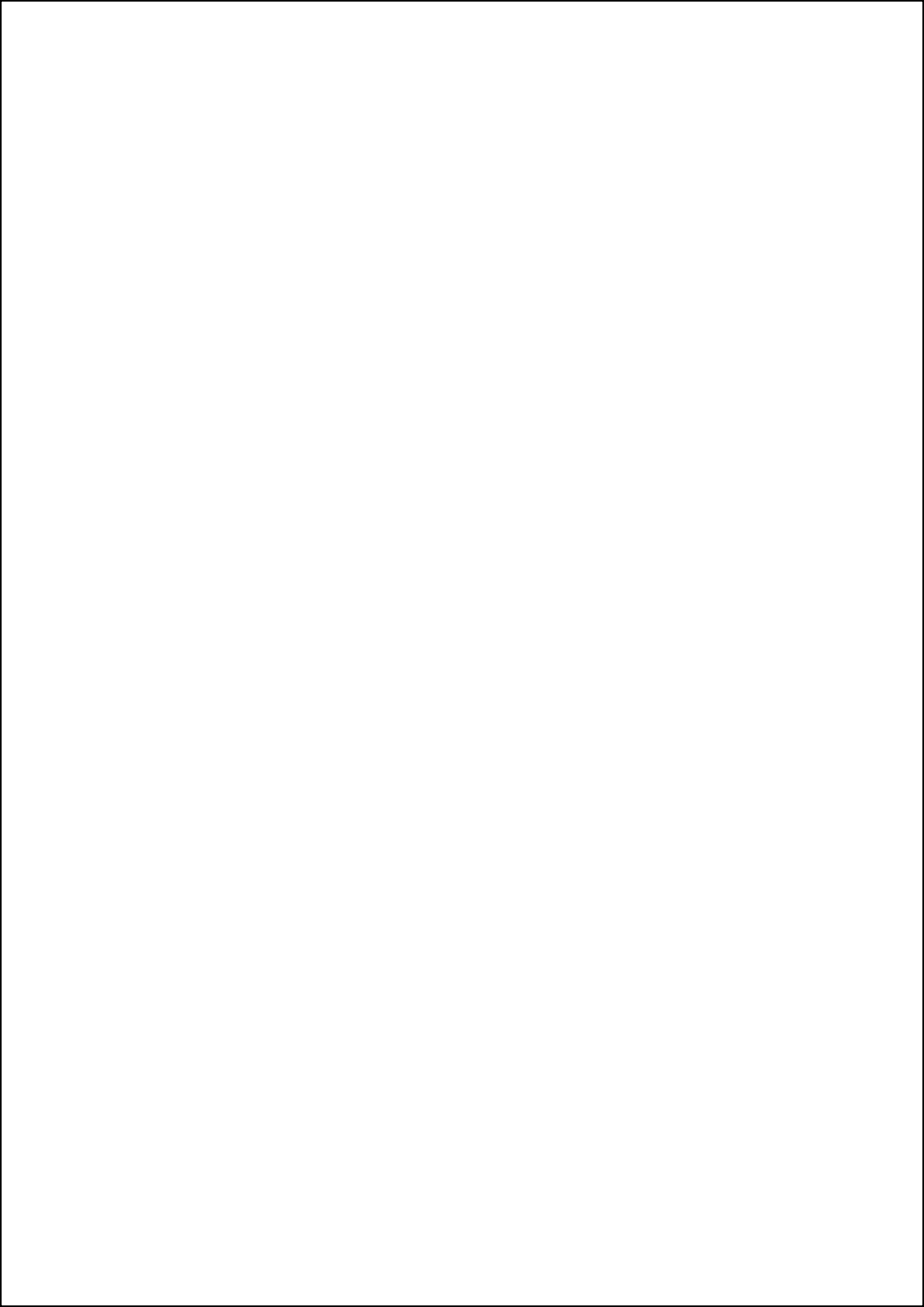
Higher incidences of adult apprenticeship are more likely to be found in countries with academic-oriented upper-secondary education, weak or non-existent IVET systems, with low levels of regulation of labour markets, weak social partner involvement, and in countries where the social and inclusion function of apprenticeship training outweighs its training function.

A low proportion of adult apprentices does not necessarily signal a lack of appropriate training provision for adults but may simply reflect the strong role of dual IVET. Vice versa, a high proportion of adult apprentices does not necessarily indicate an approach that is well adjusted to adult participants' needs.

A particular type of apprenticeship scheme, primarily designed to help the unemployed and other disadvantaged groups, has grown in numbers over the last two decades. Such schemes usually exist side by side with other apprenticeship programmes and are fully financed from social budgets.

There is a lack of theories to explain the prevalence, potential and limits of apprenticeships (for youth and adults alike) in developing countries and informal economies. Corresponding approaches could be equally informative for developing apprenticeships in the gig economy and in areas with precarious employment.

²⁵ Compare for instance the case of apprenticeship policies in Ghana (Ayentimi, Burgess and Dayaram 2018).





4

**Tuning
programmes
and funding to
the needs of
adults**

Tuning programmes and funding to the needs of adults: Key policy issues around apprenticeships for adults

In addition to the structural explanation for patterns of provision and participation in adult apprenticeship training at the macro level as presented above, any successful policy must consider the interests of the individual actors at the micro level. How should adult apprenticeship look in order to be attractive from the points of view of employers, learners, the government and social partners? Why should employers prefer adults over young people? How should apprenticeship programmes for youth be adapted to be attractive to adult learners? In this chapter, we turn to these and similar questions. In particular, we discuss incentives for employers and the role of public subsidies (3.1), the attractiveness of apprenticeships from the point of view of adults and how this is linked to apprentice pay (3.2), the importance of recognizing prior learning (3.3) and how learning methods can be tuned to the needs of adults (3.4).

► 4.1 Making adult apprenticeship more attractive for employers: Incentives for companies

The involvement of firms in VET provision depends on the willingness of firms to invest in skill formation (Busemeyer and Trampusch 2012). This has been dealt with in the ILO's ADULT project's forthcoming publication titled "Enhancing attractiveness of apprenticeships for enterprises, specifically SMEs". Employers' interest in offering apprenticeships is normally driven by their short-term needs but can be also linked to strategic, long-term goals and the expected benefits available for the company by choosing a staffing strategy. Moreover, the opportunity to make a contribution to the wider education and economic systems can play a role (Chankseliani and Anuar 2019, 261).

In case costs are equal, companies follow a short-term rational choice approach and consider apprenticeship as one option among many to fill skills gaps. It can be assumed that employers are more likely to choose older candidates than younger ones, preferably in their late twenties, thirties or early forties. At this age, workers usually have sufficient work experience and soft skills, family plans are mostly complete, they are not very mobile (hence more likely to stay with the employer), and are considered particularly productive, while retirement is still a long way off. Reasons for opting for younger workers

instead, although there are several, are principally financial (as young workers are cheaper). Employers often criticize young people for poor general knowledge and work attitudes, and, above all, there are special youth protection regulations in place to limit the deployability of juvenile workers (see table 5). Thus, from an employer’s point of view, assuming a classical (rational choice) human capital perspective, adult apprenticeship would be more the norm, and it is hard to explain why employers invest in young people.

The advantages of older candidates, on the other hand, are partly set off by the overall higher wage levels (or wage expectations) for adult apprentices than those for young ones (as for instance regulated in collective agreements or by national minimum wages²⁶). An employer’s deal to offer training and a job in exchange for a lower salary and the candidates they look for will, of course, differ greatly. Compare for example a piano maker in Switzerland, a retail chain in Australia and a wood carver in Nigeria. Nevertheless, in each of these cases, such deals and the way they are eventually influenced by public subsidies or by other incentives are at the core of understanding the differences between national apprenticeship systems.

Table 5. Reasons for employers and adults to engage in apprenticeships

| Reasons for employers to engage in adult apprenticeship | | Reasons for adults to engage in apprenticeship |
|--|---|--|
| vs youth apprenticeship | vs youth apprenticeship | vs on-the job training or non-formal training |
| Not limited by any youth protection regulation (e.g. late working hours) | Less costly because co-funded by the state | Enable more sustainable career changes, i.e., easier to change occupation or job, moving up corporate hierarchies, becoming in-company trainer or becoming self-employed |
| Expectations of higher productivity | More likely to bring new know-how and innovation into the company | Increased job security and better income |
| Can rely on more experience, better general knowledge and soft skills | No other options to acquire the skills needed (because training is exclusively offered as apprenticeship) | More self-confidence, building occupational identity and becoming part of professional communities/associations |
| Can use shortened apprenticeships/have less off-the-job learning | Higher job satisfaction | Better career opportunities in terms of access to further and higher education |
| Less likely to change job/employer | | |

Source: Authors

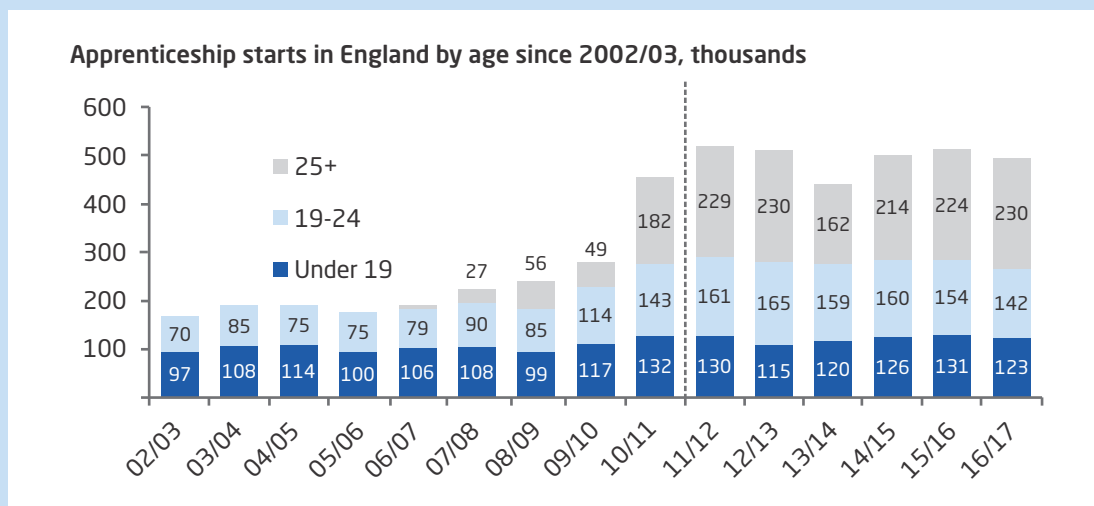
²⁶ See for instance national minimum wages for apprentices in England according to age: <https://www.gov.uk/national-minimum-wage-rates> (accessed 26 Nov 2021)

The preference given to older workers and the volatility of apprenticeship systems vis-à-vis public funding can be illustrated well by the development of apprenticeships in England over the last 20 years (see box 1). The example shows that public money put into apprenticeship systems primarily benefits older, incumbent workers because of the interests and behaviour of companies, and that in liberal market economies apprenticeship numbers fluctuate relatively strongly with public investment.

Box 1. The growth of adult apprenticeships in England and the practice of “conversion”

Since 2000, apprenticeship starts in England have tripled. This remarkable growth has been driven in large part by those aged 25 years and over. Since 2003, the upper age limit of 25 for apprentices was gradually abolished in England, while previously virtually all apprentices were under 25. There has been a steady growth of adult apprenticeships since then, reflecting the preferences of employers for older apprentices, with a sudden jump between 2009/10 and 2010/11.

Figure 1. Apprenticeship starts in England, 2002–2017, by age group



A report by Amin-Smith, Cribb and Sibieta (2017, 14) on reforms to apprenticeship funding assumes that the increase between 2009/10 and 2010/11 for those aged 25 and over is likely “to reflect, at least partly, the reduction of funding for the Train to Gain programme – which subsidized employer training of (primarily) those aged 25 and over. For filling the gaps, regular training for adults 25+ seemed to become rebranded as a form of apprenticeship to appeal on the available funding. This implies that a lot of the increase is in fact ‘relabelling’ of corporate non-formal training as apprenticeships”.

Also, Hogarth and Gambin claim that many of those apprentices were already (sometimes even long-standing) employees of the company that was about to train them, and expressed reasonable concerns “that apprenticeships have been used as a human resource management practice designed to improve recruitment and retention and drive up employee motivation rather than as a skills intervention” (Hogarth and Gambin 2017, 7). This practice is known in England as “conversion” (see also table 1) and has been commented on by Fuller as follows: “The practice of converting existing employees into apprentices to support the attainment of the government’s numerical targets is grossly undermining the concept of apprenticeship as a model of learning” (Fuller and Unwin 2012,



8). However, conversion can also be viewed positively as providing an opportunity for recognition and certification of existing skills.

Looking at the years between 2011 and 2017, the age distribution of apprentices has been quite stable, with an exception in 2013/14, when there was a large fall in the number of apprentices aged 25 or over, which has been attributed to the government's attempts in this year to make these apprentices pay for part of their apprenticeship (Amin-Smith, Cribb and Sibieta 2017). In contrast, the introduction of the apprenticeship levy in England in 2017/2018 has again given a boost to apprenticeships starts by adults (see also box 3 further below).

Source: Authors

The case of England is certainly worth further scrutiny with regards to the sustainability of apprenticeship renewal, in particular in terms of the change in the quality of apprenticeships, which has been challenged by various authors (Fortwengel, Gospel, and Toner 2021; McNally 2020; Richmond 2020). However, this would go beyond the scope of this paper. For our purposes, it is sufficient to record that in liberal market economies in which apprenticeships are equally offered to youth and adults, employers may have a preference for offering apprenticeships to incumbent older workers than to new and younger workers,²⁷ and that apprenticeship numbers can heavily depend on public funding, in particular if practices of conversion are not prevented.

From a lifelong learning perspective, it is important to consider that certain disadvantaged groups benefit from access to apprenticeships more than others. During the COVID-19 pandemic, a lot of money has been spent in some countries to help companies maintain or even expand apprenticeships (see for instance the Irish example in the box below). Without further differentiation, apprenticeships for adults gain more indirect benefit from such subsidies, as companies tend to release younger employees and employees who have been with the company for less time. However, if adults experience disadvantages themselves

²⁷ In 2019/20, apprenticeship starts in England by age show that the largest group was those aged 19–25 years (30%), followed by 25–34 years (24%), 35–44 years (13%) and 45–59 years (9%). Niamh Foley, Apprenticeship Statistics, briefing paper (House of Commons Library, 2021).

(for example, long-term unemployment, migration, low skill levels) and cannot compete with younger apprentice candidates, they are particularly disadvantaged and depend on public support.

In principle, all financial incentives for companies to offer apprenticeships benefit younger and older apprentices equally (see box 2 for examples from EU countries). However, as explained, the specific economic situation and the special needs of individual groups may require more targeted measures, or as Aggarwal and colleagues put it: “Depending on the socio-economic context surrounding skills development and desired policy outcomes, governments may provide incentives (financial and non-financial) to promote



the participation of employers, particularly small and medium enterprises (SMEs), young women, disadvantaged groups and adult workers in quality apprenticeship programmes” (ILO 2019, 7).

There is a wide variety of existing measures in many countries to incentivize companies to take on apprentices²⁸ (Cedefop 2020a, OECD 2017), which can be equally used for young and adult apprentices (grants, bonuses, tax incentives, etc.). Grants for companies are among the most commonly used financial instruments by public actors to encourage employers to get involved in apprenticeships, including in the context of COVID-19 (see box below). Clearly, the appropriateness and transferability of these instruments to other contexts need to be proved in each case.

Box 2. Grants for companies that can be equally used for young and adult apprentices

India introduced the National Apprenticeship Promotion Scheme (NAPS) in 2016, under which the Government of India subsidizes the cost of basic training and the cost of monthly stipends. The scheme is now under revision to provide greater benefit to SMEs that offer formal apprenticeship opportunities. NAPS is not linked to the age of apprentices.²⁹

In Finland, employers receive a training compensation to develop the skills of their employees and thus maintain their employment in the long run.³⁰ The grant is paid on a monthly basis and usually amounts to €250 per month (thus covering only a minor part of the actual on-the-job training costs, including gross wages of internal/external instructors). It could be argued that taking on apprentices

²⁸ The existing measures are described in a Cedefop online database: Database on financing apprenticeships in the EU.

²⁹ Government of India, “National Apprenticeship Promotion Scheme (NAPS)”.

³⁰ More details can be found in the Cedefop Database on financing apprenticeships in the EU – Training compensation.

could be quite attractive for Finnish employers. According to estimations, in 2015 around 4,000 companies benefited from the subsidy.

The Irish Government introduced the Apprenticeship Incentivisation Scheme for employers of apprentices as part of the 2020 July Jobs Stimulus package. Employers who take on an apprentice are given €3,000. To date, over 1,500 employers have benefited from the scheme, hiring over 3,000 apprentices. An announcement on the Generation Apprenticeship website on 26 April 2022 says, “The decision to extend the Scheme to the end of 2021 underlines the Government’s commitment to the new action plan for apprenticeship, while acknowledging the real financial challenges faced by employers as Ireland navigates its way out of the COVID-19 pandemic.”

Source: Authors and Generation Apprenticeship website.

Further, there are specific instruments to subsidize companies that provide apprenticeships to adults or the unemployed (both young and adult) (see table 6).³¹

Table 6. Examples of public subsidies for companies that provide apprenticeships to adults or the unemployed

In Denmark, employers who wish to provide apprenticeship to either unemployed persons or unskilled workers and who are approved to have apprentices can apply for grants. A subsidy to cover part of an adult apprentice’s hourly wage amounts to 30 or 40 Danish kroner depending on the length of unemployment (roughly 20–30 per cent of the average apprentice’s hourly wage). The company may receive subsidies of up to 1,5 million kroner over a three-year period. This instrument is organized by the Danish Agency for Labour Market and Recruitment and has been in place since 1997.

In Finland, companies employing former unemployed people as apprentices can apply for a subsidy from municipal employment authorities. The amount of subsidy is based on the length of unemployment and ranges from 30 per cent to 50 per cent of the wage costs. This instrument has been used by the Public Employment Service since 1995.

In France, employers receive additional financial incentives of 2,000 euros per person for taking on older (45+) job seekers under the apprenticeship scheme “contrat de professionnalisation”ⁱⁱ (to compare: the minimum wage in France is around 1,500 euros).

In Austria, an employer who takes on an apprentice older than 18 years of age (the age of majority) is entitled to a grant that corresponds to a collectively agreed-upon auxiliary staff salary in the respective sector. The grant amounts to three monthly salaries for the first year of apprenticeship, two monthly salaries for the 2nd apprenticeship year, and one month salary for the third and fourth apprenticeship years.

In Australia, companies can get a grant of 4,000 Australian dollars for employing an adult apprentice once the apprentice has successfully completed 12 months of training (i.e. roughly 10 per cent of the average apprentice’s annual wage). The idea is to remove barriers to taking up an adult apprentice.

Source: Authors

Notes: (i) Estimates by the author based on own research; (ii) Ministère du Travail, de l’Emploi et de l’Insertion

³¹ In addition, there are numerous funding measures that are directed towards the upskilling and reskilling of adults in general both for companies (for example, tax incentives, grants) and individuals (for example, training leave, training vouchers, individual learning accounts) that can also be used to support apprenticeships. However, it would go beyond the scope of this paper to go explore these in detail.

Chankseliani and Anuar (2019, 272) state in their research, “Despite all the factors that may incentivize employers to offer apprenticeships, many firms view apprenticeship arrangements as too costly, risky and complex to justify the investment.” For example, trained apprentices may leave their employer after the completion of training if they are attracted by another company. Employers offering apprenticeships as part of collectives or umbrella associations may be more inclined to provide apprenticeships than individual firms would be (Chankseliani and Anuar 2019). In this case, providing apprenticeship education is viewed more as a common good, with a dedicated mechanism of cost sharing among the involved parties. One example of such a cost-sharing mechanism is the training fund. Training funds incentivize employers to engage in training activities by imposing a tax (levy) on all companies or a specific type of company, and by using the money collected to redistribute the funds only to companies that train their employees or apprentices. Training funds (which could be national, regional or sectoral) are in place in many countries, but they take on different shapes depending upon contextual factors³² (see box below).

Box 3. Training funds

The Employers’ Reimbursement Fund (AUB) in Denmark is a national training fund that spreads out the cost and benefits of apprenticeship training amongst its members. All employers in Denmark make contributions to this fund for each full-time employee; subsequently, employers with apprentices can then claim reimbursement when their trainees attend vocational school (Chankseliani and Anuar 2019). An evaluation of the apprenticeship system in Denmark (which the AUB contributes to) pointed to significant positive employment effects. For example, 70 per cent of the unemployed adults who completed the apprenticeship were employed one year following the end of the training (compared to 58 per cent of unemployed adults from a control group).

Since April 2017, UK employers with an annual pay bill in excess of 3 million pound sterling are required to pay the Apprenticeship Levy. The levy is paid at a rate of 0.5 per cent of the pay bill exceeding the 3 million threshold. Levy contributions can be spent on apprenticeship starts ranging from intermediate apprenticeships (level 2) to higher-level apprenticeships (level 4 and above). There is evidence that over the period between 2015/16 and 2018/19, which spans the introduction of the Apprenticeship Levy, there was a substantial shift away from lower-level apprenticeship starts to higher-level starts. Moreover, this shift was greater for employers who were required to pay the levy, with smaller reductions in lower-level apprenticeships and greater increases in higher-level apprenticeships when compared to similar non-levy paying employers. Also, for adult apprentices (aged 25+), higher-level apprenticeship starts accounted for the highest share in 2020/21.³³

According to Chankseliani and Anuar (2019, 274), “In South Africa, the Tripartite Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) implement sector skills plans by starting learnerships, disbursing the training levies contributed by all employers, approving workplace skills plans from employers, and overseeing education and training in their sectors. SETAs include representatives from trade unions, employers’ associations, the government, and professional bodies.”

Note: (i) See Cedefop’s Database on financing apprenticeships in the EU - Employers training contribution. (ii) See September 2013 Rapport. Evaluering af voksenlærlingeordningen. Effekter, anvendelse og incitamenter.

Source: Authors

³² For example, in countries with a smaller share of employees covered by collective agreements or with lower trade union density, training funds are mainly operated by state institutions (e.g., Hungary, the UK and Ireland).

³³ Education statistics 2020/21, <https://content.explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/api/releases/b1da2613-abce-4dc1-b411-7954c6468d01/files/bf7797ee-8502-44d7-e5ea-08d8dfbe3cc7>. Please note: the 2020/21 data covers a period affected by varying Covid-19 restrictions, which will have impacted on apprenticeship learning and also provider reporting behaviour.

Chapter 3.1. Lessons learned and key messages

General incentives for companies to provide apprenticeships benefit both adults and youth, although depending on the labour market situation, adult apprentices may benefit more.

All things being equal, many employers will prefer adult apprentices over younger ones. This needs to be reflected in funding instruments by targeting disadvantaged adults (for example, unemployed, low-skilled, migrants).

There is a variety of existing measures to subsidize companies (a) to provide apprenticeship places in general and (b) specifically offer apprenticeship places to adults and the unemployed. In Europe, Cedefop has started to collect data on such measures, and it would be beneficial to extend this collection beyond Europe.

The suitability and transferability of funding instruments must be checked on a case-by-case basis as there are too many contextual factors that make general comparability difficult. Moreover, a cross-country meta-evaluation of these instruments is currently missing.

▶ 4.2 Improving the attractiveness of apprenticeships for adult learners: Public funding and regulating apprentice pay

The reasons for adults to start an apprenticeship may be manifold, as previously discussed (to get back into employment, to change one's job or profession, to increase one's career options or income, to pursue a new goal after retirement, etc.), but there are also other paths to achieve such goals. The number of occupations that can only be accessed through apprenticeship training has diminished in most countries. Nevertheless, there are certainly many jobs and professions for which apprenticeship training is the most appropriate way of learning, in terms of both the time needed and the importance of practical and tacit knowledge.

From an adult learner's perspective, there are at least two crucial arguments for starting an apprenticeship instead of taking on other forms of training (for example, school-based training and non-recognized training). First is the fact that apprentices can start working and get to know their field from day one. Adult apprentices don't have to wait to finish their qualification to get to know their workplace. Alternatively, they could choose to undertake learning on the job and have their skills recognized later, but this also carries some risks. Secondly, in terms of the cost-benefit ratio or the balance between learning and earning, an apprenticeship offers the most efficient and least risky approach to reskilling. In contrast, studying and earning one's living in a job different from one's field of study is inefficient for learning and often requires enormous effort to reconcile the two activities. In the case of (formal) upskilling and the wish to stay with the same employer, apprenticeship training is often the most obvious solution. However, a widening of the apprentice's horizons through sufficient off-the-job learning and exchange with other apprentices (for instance, in intercompany training centres) is crucial in such cases.

Against this backdrop, it is also clear which conditions need to be fulfilled for adult learners to decide on their apprenticeships. Firstly, the training should not be any longer than needed, and prior learning should therefore be recognized and/or its duration (in relation to youth apprenticeship) shortened. Learning needs to be individualized or modularized to a high degree to cater to different learning requirements

(as groups of adult learners are usually less homogenous than younger ones), while at the same time providing standardized qualifications (in terms of their currency). Finally, the cost-benefit ratio, which is usually only looked at from the employer's perspective, also needs to be considered from the learner's perspective. We first turn to the financial aspects from the point of view of adult learners, and in the subsequent chapters, to the non-financial conditions mentioned.

As argued above, the way costs are shared between employers, adult apprentices and the public purse is central to both the social dialogue and the collective or individual bargaining around apprenticeship training. While many national policies do not consider apprenticeship for adults as a separate type of apprenticeship, age and family situations are factors that are important to consider in the funding of apprenticeships in most countries. Hence, remuneration, social protection coverage and other working conditions tend to differ between youth and adult workers while doing an apprenticeship. In countries that aim to promote adult apprenticeships, wages will strongly influence whether adults will be able to afford to pursue programmes, as they usually support themselves and often have family responsibilities (OECD 2018).

A comparative study on financing apprenticeship training in Europe conducted by Cedefop (2020a) found that in countries with strong apprenticeship systems, apprentice pay is usually set collectively, which means that it is part of the sectoral collective bargaining. However, in the majority of EU member states, apprentice pay is set centrally by the government, often as a specific share of the minimum wage. However, even if remuneration is based on the minimum wage, the remuneration will vary between sectors or trades. And, with a very few exceptions, apprentice pay increases with each apprenticeship year, as apprentices become more productive and the benefits for employers increase.

Only in a few European countries (Belgium, France and the Netherlands) are the different financial needs of young people and adults regulated via the apprentice remuneration to be paid by employers; in most cases, additional public funding is made available. For instance, in France, the remuneration for apprentices (*contrat d'apprentissage*) under the age of 21 varies between 855 and 1,010 euros, and for apprentices aged between 21 and 25, it varies between 1,088 and 1,243 euros.³⁴ In the Netherlands, the annual gross income for a bricklayer's apprentice in the first year would be 4,670 euros, and 7,150 euros in the fourth year. However, for an apprentice over 23 years old, it would be 12,200 euros.³⁵

In contrast in Germany, apprentices can apply for a specific grant if the apprentice wage is not enough to cover their living costs. The German public employment service (PES) (Bundesagentur für Arbeit, the federal employment agency) supports apprentices during their training with a non-repayable grant of up to 700 euros per month to cover living expenses, travel costs, costs for childcare and so on (Cedefop 2020a and own research). Student loans under the *Bundesausbildungsförderungsgesetz* (BAföG) or Federal Training Promotion Act are also available to participants in post-apprenticeship continuing VET (CVET) courses, notably for master craftsmen candidates. Among other things, the loans may cover payments for childcare (for the duration of the course). Citizens of the European Union, migrants and refugees living in Germany can also receive BAföG loans as financial support during their studies or schooling.³⁶

In sum, there are essentially two models. Either higher apprentice pay for adults is in place (irrespective of being set collectively or centrally, regulated by an age threshold or dependent upon the individual's age) or apprentice pay for young people and adults is the same, in which case additional individual grants are

³⁴ A minimum basic salary (e.g., 855 euros) applies to holders of a non-professional qualification or diploma at the bac level or of a professional qualification or diploma below the bac. It is increased (e.g. 1,010 euros) if the young person holds a professional qualification or diploma equal to or higher than the baccalaureate level (see *Contrat de professionnalisation*).

³⁵ As regards pay rates, in Australia, adult apprentices are defined as those who are 21 years or older when they start their apprenticeship.

³⁶ For more information, see BAföG auch ohne deutschen Pass.



usually provided. The latter seems to be the case in countries in which the young-person paradigm model of apprenticeship dominates, and (without further proof or evidence) it can only be assumed that the first model (higher apprentice pay for adults) is more likely to attract adult learners. However, it also has to be noted that in cases where apprenticeship wages are generally close to worker wages, there is little room for paying more to older apprentices.

Box 4. Apprenticeship wages for adults in Denmark and Finland

In Denmark, adults are entitled to higher apprenticeship salaries compared to young people. A special adult apprentice salary (*voksenlærlingeløn*) has been introduced to make it less of a financial burden for low-qualified adults to enrol in apprenticeship. The salaries vary according to the employment status of the apprentice at the time of enrolment (Cedefop 2020a, 47).

In Finland, apprentices receive wages of about 80 per cent of those of a skilled worker in a particular field (Stenström and Virolainen 2014). The costs of wages and social insurance are fully paid by employers. Employers may benefit, however, from a state grant known as “Training compensation”. Apprentices who do not get paid for off-the-job training (school) days are entitled to receive an allowance to cover their living expenses during off-the-job training days. The support includes a daily allowance, a family allowance, a travel allowance and an accommodation allowance. The level of support will also depend on the number of school days and the family situation.

Note: In both countries, apprenticeship wages are set by collective agreements, which generally results in higher remunerations (Cedefop 2020a).

Note: (i) See Cedefop’s Database on financing apprenticeships in the EU - Apprenticeship training.

Source: Authors

The role that apprenticeships play in a country's skills system is an important contextual feature as explained in section 3.2. In countries with large youth apprenticeship systems (for example, Germany and Switzerland), adults in search of an apprenticeship will be competing with young people and are likely to struggle to find employers willing to meet their higher wage expectations. By contrast, in countries where apprenticeships mostly serve adults (for example, Canada and the United States), many adults work at the same firm that takes them on as an apprentice. For the firm, the apprenticeships are used as employee training. Since the firm is already paying regular employee wages to the apprentice before the training period, it is willing to pay this wage also during the apprenticeship programme, resulting in relatively high apprenticeship wages compared to other countries. (OECD 2018). In the third group of countries, characterized by a model of predominantly informal apprenticeships (see section 1.3), the question of decent salaries for apprentices (young and/or adult) is key. One possible solution for adults is passing through an RPL process and acquiring a nationally recognized certification, which entitles the person to a corresponding salary (see section 3.3).

Chankseliani, Keep, and Wilde (2017) point out that apprentices' ages and gender are an important correlate of pay and that pay differences between sectors may disguise a gender gap in apprentice pay. For instance, the occupations of hairdressing, children's care and learning are among the lowest paid in England, and are also among the occupations with a relatively high proportion of women (London Economics 2013). Although there have been more female than male apprenticeship starts since 2010, gender imbalances are still widely prevalent within apprenticeship opportunities in the UK³⁷ (and elsewhere).

Finally, apprenticeship programmes and funding that are primarily designed to help the unemployed or other disadvantaged groups to improve their vocational skills, and hence increase their employability, and which are usually part of a country's active labour market policies (ALMPs) need to be considered. Such programmes are usually fully paid for by contributions to social security. Markowitsch and Wittig (2020) describe these programmes as a particular type of apprenticeship scheme that usually exists side by side with other apprenticeship programmes, and which have grown in numbers over the last two decades.

In France, for instance, the *contrat de professionnalisation*, which exists in parallel to the *contrat d'apprentissage*, targets unemployed people over 26 years of age. This programme came into force in 2004 and aims to provide access to employment through the acquisition of a recognized professional qualification. Around one third of all France's apprentices are part of this programme (Cedefop 2021a). In Portugal, the *Cursos de Aprendizagem* scheme was introduced in 2005/2006 as a fast VET track for people between 15 and 24 years old who are not in education, employment or training (NEET). Instead of a salary, apprentices receive reimbursement of some costs (for example, transport or meals), and, since 2008, a scholarship of around 40 euros a month (Markowitsch and Wittig 2020).

In addition to such specific apprenticeship programmes, special funding for the training of the unemployed may be used to finance apprenticeship training. For instance, the so-called *Skilled Workers Scholarship* (*Fachkräftestipendium*) in Austria is a grant available for the unemployed, which can be used to complete an apprenticeship (the grant is the same as the unemployment benefit and is provided for a maximum of three years).

³⁷ More information on this can be found in the Women Returners Annual Report 2016.

Chapter 3.2. Lessons learned and key messages

The higher financial needs of adult apprentices are either fulfilled by determining higher apprentice pay for adults or by providing individual grants in addition to the general apprentice remuneration (the second approach being more likely in countries where the young-person paradigm of apprenticeship prevails).

No comparisons of the two approaches are available, but it can be assumed that the first model (higher apprentice pay for adults) is more likely to attract adult learners.

There are numerous funding measures that are in general directed to the upskilling and reskilling of individual adults (for example, training leave, training vouchers and individual learning accounts), which can also be used for apprenticeships.

A particular type of apprenticeship scheme that is primarily designed to help the unemployed or other disadvantaged groups has grown in popularity over the past two decades. Such schemes usually exist side by side with other apprenticeship programmes and are fully financed by social budgets.

► 4.3 Tuning apprenticeship programmes to the needs of adults and the importance of RPL

The ILO Toolkit for Quality Apprenticeships highlights that extending “apprenticeship opportunities to adults and older workers would require corresponding adjustments in apprenticeship systems and programmes” (ILO 2020, 13). “Adjustments” may refer to the duration of programmes, the balance between work-based and school-based learning, and the extent of RPL. For instance, approaches including modularization, distance learning, and part-time provision enable education to be combined with the responsibilities of adult life (see box 5 below).

While “adult entrants to apprenticeships may already have considerable work experience and, therefore, possess some or even all of the skills and knowledge necessary to perform the job” (ILO 2020, 13), RPL is particularly important as it facilitates accelerated completion or even direct access to the final qualifying examinations without undergoing apprenticeship training, etc.

For instance, the Artisan RPL (ARPL) process in South Africa aims at the upskilling of adult artisans to enable them pass a trade test and get a nationally recognized certificate, which in turn enables them to receive a higher salary (see Case Study B on South Africa). In Denmark, adult apprentices are able to shorten the total length of their learning trajectory thanks to a system for accreditation of prior learning. Thus, the total duration of a programme for adults can vary depending upon the student’s prior practical experience and educational achievements (Cedefop 2019). Finally, RPL might also be one way (among others) to include informal apprenticeships in the national training system (ILO 2011), which is highly relevant for adult apprentices.

Essentially, two approaches can be identified in adapting apprenticeship programmes for adults. One approach suggests a general shortening of the duration of apprenticeship programmes and/or a reduction of the programme depending on the prior experience of the learner. This approach usually targets particular groups: graduates from general education or higher education; experienced workers; low-skilled workers, and so on. For instance, apprenticeship applicants with an upper-secondary

school-leaving certificate, qualifications at the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) or ISCED level 4 or higher usually don't have to participate in the school-based part of the training. It is also quite common to shorten apprenticeships in general for adults after a certain age (see tables 2 and 3). However, these measures of shortening traditional apprenticeships need to be distinguished from other efforts to provide short-track dual vocational training programmes. The former could either be apprenticeship programmes in which only a part of the full programme needs to be completed to cater for persons with disabilities or those who face other difficulties entering full-length dual programmes (for example, in Austria, Germany or Denmark) or they could be programmes for particularly gifted young people who don't need a full programme to achieve the expected standards (for example, in Switzerland).³⁸

The other approach builds on individualization and modularization, meaning it is even more flexible and open, and is not necessarily addressed at particular target groups. This is the approach taken in the UK, South Africa, Australia, and Finland. Regardless of the two approaches, in many countries final apprenticeship exams are offered as external examinations, not requiring any attendance of an educational programme (although preparatory or additional³⁹ courses are usually in place). These two approaches (a general shortening of the duration of apprenticeship programmes and individualization/modularization) are not mutually exclusive and can be combined.

To sum up: The use of a personalized approach in adjusting apprenticeships to the needs of adults helps to avoid overlapping studies and to shorten the study period, taking into consideration the learning outcomes acquired through non-formal and informal learning.

Box 5. Examples for adjustment of apprenticeships to the needs of adults

Denmark introduced special measures (enshrined in legislation) for adapting apprenticeships to the needs and conditions of adults. For example, employed adults can enrol in an apprenticeship programme by signing an apprenticeship contract with their employer, and this programme is then tailored to the needs of the adult. When the learner has more than two years of relevant work experience, only off-the-job training (at the vocational school) is required for gaining a vocational certificate (Cedefop 2019).

In Finland, there is an "individualization process" for adult learners. For example, 'an individualization plan is prepared for each apprentice outlining how the apprentice will learn to achieve the desired qualification. This includes, for example, if and how existing vocational skills need to be supplemented (for example, through on-the-job learning or participation in a preparatory training).

In England, Apprenticeship Standards have been introduced – these are definitions of end-point competency. A programme undertaken by an apprentice can be tailored to take them from their start point (which is unique to that individual), and develop their knowledge, skills and behaviours to achieve the defined (end-point) competency. This makes it possible to adjust programmes to suit different audiences, including adults with different experiences, without having separate standards, governance, and so on.

Note: Individualization in Finland is an official concept defined in guidance-related legislation. It can be understood as a mode of delivery of VET, i.e., the student-centred approach is of particular importance.

Source: Authors

³⁸ For a description of the different national purposes and approaches to short-track apprenticeships, see, for instance: Di Maio, Graf and Wilson (2019); Di Maio et al. (2020); and Becker et al. (2018).

³⁹ Additional courses are organized when a person needs to acquire a learning outcome or a competence that he/she does not possess but that is included in the qualification that the person aims for through a validation process. In the ARPL process in South Africa, this is called a gap closure training.

Different target groups within the large group of adult apprentices require further specifically adapted measures, such as refugees and migrants (see box 6).

Box 6. Apprenticeship programmes targeted at migrants

“Just Integration” is an initiative in Austria aimed at unemployed young adults (between 18 and 30 years of age) with multiple problems related to the labour market. Currently, the majority of the participants are unemployed refugees as well as unemployed persons with a subsidiary protection status. The overall objective is to prepare participants for the apprenticeship leave exam through the provision of vocational education and training, accompanied by support measures such as, for example, German language courses and mentoring. The overall duration of the VET course (without the accompanying support measures) is approximately a year. The foundation Aufleb GmbH coordinates the day-to-day activities at the local and national levels, and it finances the education and training activities as well as the support measures with funds from the so-called insolvency contingency fund. Participants receive an apprentice income from the training company (at least 60 euros per month) as well as a livelihood aid covered by the regional PES.

The Basic Integration Education (IGU) programme for migrants and refugees (between 18 and 40 years of age) in Denmark offers a two-year traineeship in which the participants undergo training for a total of 20 weeks and then work in a business for the remaining period. As part of the programme, participants receive a paid trainee wage and the terms of employment and a training plan are collectively agreed upon (Murphy 2019, 27).

Source: Authors

Note: More information on Just Integration is available at <https://www.aufleb.at/just-integration>.

Clearly, approaches that emphasize the individualization approach require more and better career guidance (Hooley, Sultana, and Thomsen 2017). To keep track of the extended learning journeys required for successful upskilling, adults need proper counselling on the opportunities at hand and the difficulties along the way (lifelong/career guidance). For instance, career guidance is an integral part of the Portuguese adult learning system and has been integrated into the provision of validation services through the “Qualifica centres” (see box below).

Box 7. Career guidance and validation (RPL) services for low-qualified adults in Portugal

Qualifica centres are local-level structures that are embedded in a wide range of entities (i.e., public, private, profit-making organizations as well as non-governmental/civil-society organizations) and are funded from the European Social Fund (ESF) and the State budget. They

provide information, counselling and career guidance to adult learners, helping them to be more confident, aware of themselves, and capable of making decisions about their educational and professional pathways (guidance); the centres also offer adult learners the opportunity to validate their knowledge, competences and skills, and to certify them according to established standards of competencies (RPL/validation).

Source: Authors

A particular limitation in the range of educational guidance services available for employed adults is that trial apprenticeships, which are successful and common in the youth sector, are difficult to implement. Trial apprenticeships allow young people who are still at school to spend two or three days in a company to see whether the occupation they aim for is really the right choice for them. While the approach also works for the unemployed, it is difficult to start a trial apprenticeship in another company from within an existing employment relationship. New forms of short-term educational leave could be a potential solution allowing trial apprenticeships to be extended to adults who are interested in retraining.

► 4.4 Using learning methods appropriate for adult apprentices

While the previous chapter focused on structure, this section deals with learning content and approaches and discusses issues such as modes of learning, control over learning, learning venues, cooperation, and the role of mentors and trainers.⁴⁰ Cedefop (2019, 23) noted that “there is a lack of research related to both the development and implementation of specific learning approaches in the context of apprenticeship for adults across all sources considered”. However, this literature review disregards the rich tradition of andragogy, which of course offers approaches transferrable to adult apprenticeships.

Differences between the pedagogy and andragogy models relate to the concept of the learner, the role of the learner’s experience, and also the learner’s readiness, orientation and motivation. Generally, the andragogy model assumes more of the learner and places more responsibility for learning on them than on the teacher (Knowles 1984, 1-21).

Educational provisions for adults can adjust the level of support and the speed of progress to the capacities of learners in order that a pattern of exclusion often found in initial education for “slow” learners (when compared to others) is not repeated. Adults profit from support in “working around” their learning difficulties, thereby overcoming them in the long run, with adult educators often highly skilled in making the right suggestions of help (Hefler, Steinheimer, and Wulz 2018) (see box below).

Box 8. Adapting learning methods to the needs of adult apprentices

In Denmark, the learning approaches applied in apprenticeships for adults are tailored to the needs of the learners and to the ways in which they acquire new competences and knowledge. For example, teachers working with adults are required to understand and acknowledge the previous employment experiences as well as the prior education that the adult learners bring into the classroom. It is also important that teachers have insight into the motivations of adults (Cedefop 2019).

In Austria, for those who need more time and support to learn (including adults), the so-called “Integrative VET” programme, essentially an extended apprenticeship, was created. This apprenticeship period can be extended by another year, and in exceptional cases also by a

⁴⁰ To avoid replications, we will not provide information on online and remote learning approaches as this is dealt with in the forthcoming ILO ADULT project report titled “The digital transformation of apprenticeships: Emerging opportunities and barriers”.

second year. In this way, apprentices with learning difficulties are supported to pass their final apprenticeship examination.

Cedefop (2019) says, “Officially, learning approaches in Australian apprenticeships are not modified for adults. However, anecdotally, adult apprentices have generally been working in their role for some time prior to the commencement of an apprenticeship and therefore require less supervision and interventions by employers or registered training organization (RTO) staff. On-the-job training may be via workbooks or online modules, supported by occasional monitoring visits by RTO trainers through to full lecture and workshop delivery during off-site and block-release learning.”

Source: Authors

As highlighted by studies on formal adult education (Riddell and Markowitsch 2012), the provision of apprenticeships for adults requires the adoption, for the benefit of mature learners, of content and pedagogies from schemes that were developed for initial education. The challenges involved in this effort can be summarized under two headings:

Work-based, on-site learning component: Successful apprenticeship schemes require well-developed approaches for teaching formal and tacit occupational knowledge in the work situation. These approaches are described in the extended literature on work-based learning and expertise development (Lave and Wenger 1999; Billett 2010; Ericsson et al. 2006). When apprenticeships are firmly institutionalized, successful approaches for one-to-one tutoring and learning in groups are typically well developed. This type of learning is broadly in line with the needs of adult learners (Billett 2010). However, even in countries with strong apprenticeship systems, only some employers offer “good” practical training, and on-site training remains a key challenge for adult apprentices. In cases (countries or economic sectors) where there are only weak traditions for handing down the stock of formal and tacit occupational knowledge in the workplace, the on-site learning component is often poor. In such situations, the learning systems in enterprises need to be strengthened for adult apprenticeships to be successful. Further, the on-site components of apprenticeships are sometimes skipped for adult learners, as a result of which adults may fail to fully acquire the tacit components of their occupations. In sum, while acknowledgement of prior learning is facilitating adults’ access to apprenticeship routes, it may have particular challenges involving the practical parts of programmes.

School (course)-based component: In order to be successful and retain students, formal adult education should follow the principles of andragogy, giving a central role to the learner and his/her individual experiences, needs and capacities. However, studies on formal adult education have shown that throughout Europe many programmes for adults still adhere to the less promising blueprint of initial schooling (Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2021). In countries with a strong apprenticeship system for young people, the school-based training component designed for 15- to 19-year-olds is typically not aligned to the needs of adult learners at all. In these countries, alternative courses need to be (and are already, partly) provided for adult learners, with more flexible time schedules and smaller groups. Countries where apprenticeship schemes are mainly used by adult learners (for example, in Finland) or where the high uptake of apprenticeships by adults has become an unintended consequence (for example, in the UK) often have courses better aligned to the needs of adult learners. Moreover, acknowledgement of prior learning, modularization, part-time programmes and flexible timing of course provision are crucial for adult learners. Adults returning to education after longer spells of employment are also often in need of refresher and bridging courses (for example, in mathematics).

Boosting adult apprenticeships through increased government investment might not necessarily correspond with adult apprentices' wishes, and according to Fuller and Unwin (2012, 8), "there's no reason to think older workers wouldn't benefit from apprenticeships that helped them learn new skills and progress in their careers. But converting existing workers into apprentices to increase the numbers with qualifications is unlikely to help them fulfil their aspirations".

In order to capture why some apprenticeships in England offer so much more than others, Fuller and Unwin (2012) have developed an analytical tool, the expansive versus restrictive continuum, which can also be applied to other national or skills regime contexts. The key characteristics of the tool include "the extent to which apprentices are given access to (new) knowledge and skills and recognized vocational qualifications, and to structured on- and off-the-job training, the degree to which apprenticeships incorporate the opportunity to learn about the whole-work process rather than only discrete tasks, and provide a platform for higher learning and career progression". The box below illustrates two cases of apprenticeships, one located at the expansive end of the curriculum (company A) and the other at the restrictive end (company B). In reality, companies might show a mix of features. New learning methodologies, such as those driven by technology (see the forthcoming ILO ADULT project report titled "The digital transformation of apprenticeships: Emerging opportunities and barriers"), may be used to support expansive apprenticeships. However, as with any technology, they also risk being misused to restrict learning opportunities.

Box 9. Cases illustrating the expansive versus restrictive continuum

Expansive curriculum: "Company A manufactures bathroom showers and has about 700 employees. It has had an extremely well-established apprenticeship programme dating back over 50 years, which has been used to develop successive generations of skilled and qualified engineers and technicians. Many of the company's former apprentices have progressed to senior management positions."

"In company A, apprenticeship involves engagement in a wide variety of departments within the firm, attendance at college to pursue vocational qualifications, and the opportunity to take part in residential, outward-bound style activities. The apprentices have explicit status and recognition as learners; hence they gradually develop their capacity to contribute as productive workers. The apprentices gain access to multiple communities of practice inside, outside and near the firm, and to the rich opportunities for learning that this system makes available."

Restrictive curriculum: "Company B is a small family-run company with around 40 employees, providing specialized steel polishing services to other businesses. The vast majority of its employees work on the shop-floor as semi-skilled machine operators. The work is managed by the production manager and two company directors. Recently, the company turned to apprenticeships (in steel processing) for the first time, as a response to difficulties it was having in recruiting adults with relevant experience."

"Company B's apprentices are primarily involved in one community of practice. Apprentices learn on the job, by engaging in the practices of the shop floor with more experienced employees. They become fully productive in around six months. The apprentices do not have the opportunity to study for knowledge-based vocational qualifications, which could provide the underpinning theories and concepts of their wider occupational field and would facilitate their subsequent progression to higher-level study."



Fuller and Unwin (2012) argue that “far too much apprenticeship in England is located at the restrictive end of the continuum”, the key reason being that the majority of apprentices are “conversions” (see also section 2.2). “The key problem for quality is that conversions are associated with employees gaining qualifications that accredit their existing rather than new skills” (Fuller and Unwin 2012, 8-9).

Chapter 3.3 and 3.4. Lessons learned and key messages

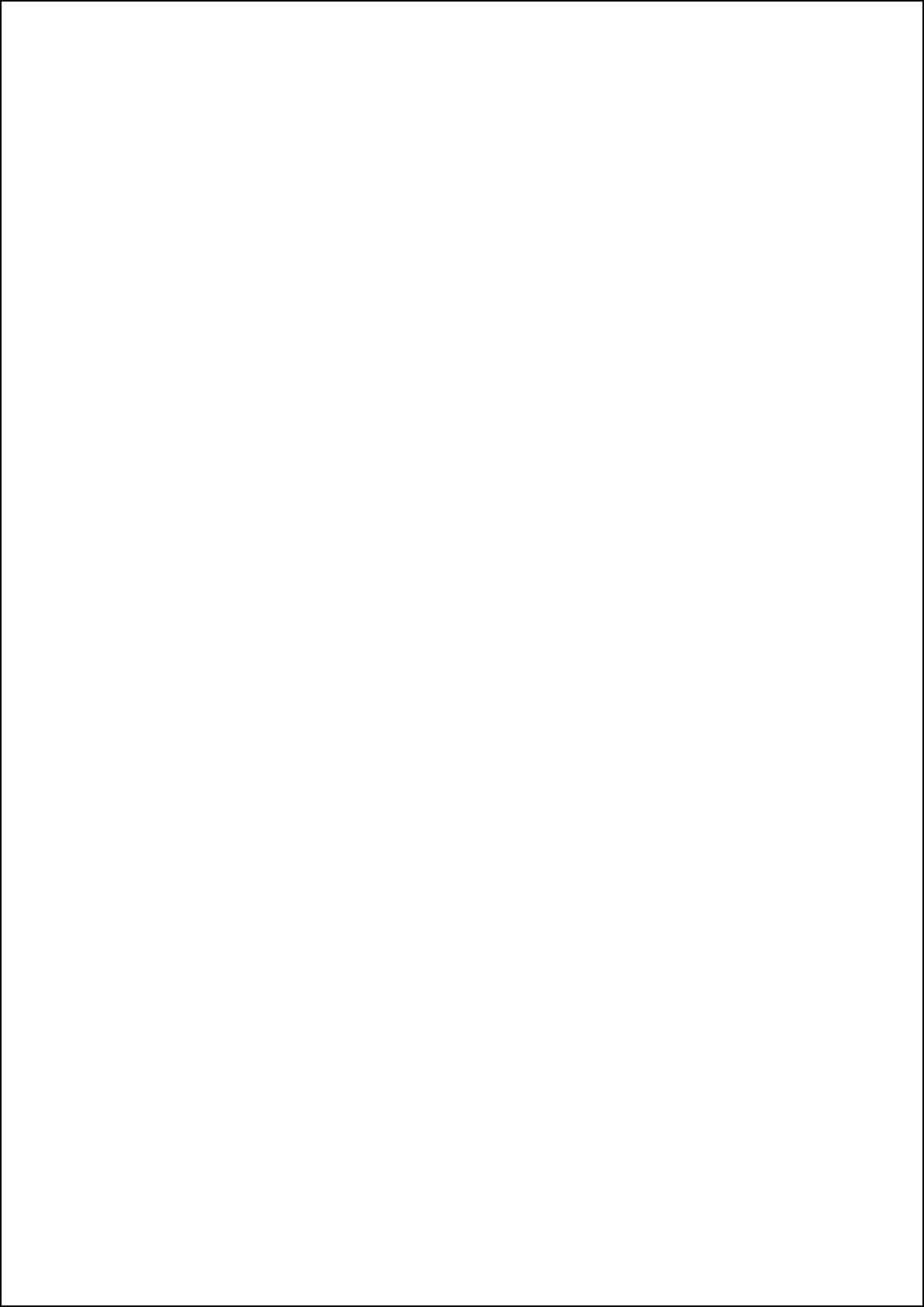
The use of a personalized approach in adjusting apprenticeships to the needs of adults helps to avoid overlapping study and to shorten the study period, taking into consideration knowledge, skills and competences acquired through formal, non-formal and informal learning.

Shortening the process of acquiring recognized apprenticeship certificates through the use of RPL, general shortening of programmes or access to final external examination (or a combination of these) is key for adult learning.

Applying adult-centred approaches to teaching and learning is an important precondition for high-quality adult apprenticeships and may also lead to improvements in the organization of apprenticeships for youth. In this respect, the professionalism of adult educators and career counsellors is critical in supporting adult learners to achieve their educational and career aspirations and also in overcoming social stereotypes such as the young-person paradigm of apprenticeship.

New measures need to be developed that avoid reactive apprenticeships and foster expansive apprenticeships and training cultures. For this purpose, action research projects with SMEs should be initiated.

Measures to allow employed adults to make use of trial apprenticeships should also be considered, for instance by adapting the existing right of individuals to education and/or by reforming labour laws/codes.





5

**Conclusions and
recommendations:
The future
of adult
apprenticeships**

Conclusions and recommendations: The future of adult apprenticeships

► 5.1 The changing notion of apprenticeship and the role of adults

Apprenticeships differ in their preferred pedagogies from school-based education, as they combine work-based training; “pedagogies of the workplace” (Billett 2002), often imparted by experienced or specifically educated members of the trade; off-the-job, school-based learning, typically provided by vocational schools; and participation in productive work within the organization providing the apprenticeship.

Towards the end of the 20th century, apprenticeship training in most of the economically developed world changed from “dead-end”⁴¹ training programmes, creating skilled workers out of youth, into open pathways at various skill levels and for diverse professions, increasingly aimed at adults. This trend towards more permeability, the expansion to lower and higher levels as well as the trend towards adult apprenticeships, has continued since the turn of the century and can be expected to persist into the future.

In many countries apprenticeships have occupied a new position within the overall system of qualifications. They are most often chosen by adults who have already gained access to higher education and who might later enter part-time higher education to broaden their occupational knowledge. Meanwhile, apprenticeship qualifications provide direct or at least mediated access to (some forms of) higher education in the majority of high-income countries. Finally, higher education has increasingly started to experiment with types of apprenticeships offering “dual study programmes”.

The situation differs for low- and medium-income countries. In places where apprenticeship programmes usually do not enable entrance to higher education, either because no such legal path exists or because various barriers make such a path de-facto impossible, it should be a top priority for governments to remove such barriers (for example, by reforming higher education admission, offering bridging courses).

According to Markowitsch and Wittig (2020), the expansion of apprenticeships to lower and higher levels has resulted in a changing notion of apprenticeship as such. Previously, apprenticeship was mainly understood as a specific type of programme that aimed to qualify skilled workers and was strongly

⁴¹ While apprenticeship training had always been accompanied by some institutionalized follow-up activities in the past, access to higher education for apprenticeship graduates was rarely possible before the 1990s.

connected to a journeyman's qualification. Markowitsch and Wittig (2020, 3) state: "In many countries this understanding gave way to an interpretation of apprenticeship as any formal learning combining on- and off-the-job learning in a structured way. [...] Hence, in this understanding neither the skill level nor the pedagogical model of master-apprenticeship nor the relation to a professional community is relevant, but the employment status (the sort of employment contract)." The authors conclude that "apprenticeships in the 21st century may become a particular approach to dual learning within the overall paradigm of lifelong learning, putting to rest the idea of craftsman and skilled worker education it was mainly associated with in the centuries before" (Markowitsch and Wittig 2020, 19).

The increase in the number of adult workers or unemployed people in apprenticeship programmes has in many countries led to these programmes becoming, in reality, adult training programmes although they officially target (also) youth. This is a fact that comes to light impressively in the case of England and Finland (in the former, more than 70 percent of the apprentices are above 19 years old, and in the latter, more than 90 percent). The political issue in such countries, as well as in the US, is not to expand apprenticeship further to adults but to make sure that it also remains an option for young people. For instance, in the US there have been arguments for increasing the participation of young people in apprenticeships, so expanding apprenticeships in this context has a kind of reverse meaning (Lerman 2013). In all these countries, measures have been taken to make apprenticeships attractive for young people as well.

▶ 5.2 Future scenarios for adult apprenticeships

If the current trends continue, they will likely lead to a scenario in which one should worry less about the incentives for adult learning and more about whether traditional apprenticeships are altogether disappearing for young people. Countries with strong dual systems (Germany, Switzerland, etc.) are still largely immune to such a development, but even there, the average age of apprentices has risen (weakly in Austria and Switzerland, moderately in Germany and strongly in Denmark).

The development of the Finnish and British apprenticeship systems provides some interesting illustrations of the tensions that emerge in transforming the idea of traditional apprenticeships into a modern concept following lifelong learning principles. Finland, in its various reforms of apprenticeships, has strongly focussed on individualization and RPL, but partly holds on to the idea of apprenticeship as "skilled worker training" by limiting the available qualifications to levels 3 to 5. In England, on the other hand, where intermediate, advanced, higher and degree apprenticeships (levels 2 to 7) are possible, we see some dissolution of the traditional concept of apprenticeship. Further, the increasing numbers of adult apprenticeships could have a crowding out effect on young people's ability to access them and may require some adjustment of funding regulations (Henehan 2019). In both cases, it remains to be seen how apprenticeships will develop in the future.

Grollmann and Markowitsch (2021) recently presented three future scenarios for apprenticeship, which they called fake, label and brand, and which provide a useful basis on which to examine the future of adult apprenticeships and discuss the potential risks of the developments in Finland, the UK and other countries. In their fake scenario, apprenticeship programmes denote specific forms of employment contract that are targeted towards employer needs. The ultimate aim of such programmes is easing access to the labour market or maintaining employment. Sometimes these programmes are publicly supported and serve as an integration measure for those who are at risk of not entering the labour market. The phenomenon of conversion in England, which has been further fuelled by the introduction of the levy, points towards this direction. Alternatively, as Richmond (2020, 4) put it: "The swift disappearance of the funds raised by the levy is the direct result of the dilution of the apprenticeship brand caused by the rapid emergence of 'fake



apprenticeships.’” Of course, this is not a settled debate in England, and the issue of “fake apprenticeship” is one of low quality, in terms of the “restrictive curriculum”, rather than one of young and old.

In the scenario that Grollmann and Markowitsch (2021) call “apprenticeship as a label”, apprenticeship has evolved into a buzzword with many meanings. The dominating logic of apprenticeship varies between pure enterprise training, school-based education and active labour market policies, depending on the motivation of the respective promoters. Grollmann and Markowitsch argue that the general pluralization and diversification of vocational education and training will support such a development, and indeed we can see signs of that in the Finnish debate on apprenticeship vs traineeship contracts (see Case Study A).⁴² The new legislative framework for VET (from 2018) gives extended flexibility to students in choosing and combining various learning environments (school-based/work-based) and to education providers in organizing programmes, so that practically any programme can get the label “apprenticeship”.

Indications for the realization of their third scenario, called “apprenticeship as a brand”, are more difficult to discern. In this case, they consider apprenticeship as “the archetypical institutionalization of a distinctive VET system that supports education goals, vocational learning and integration into the labour market” (Grollmann and Markowitsch 2021). It is further assumed that apprenticeships dominate VET provision at the upper secondary level and in professional-oriented higher education (see Grollmann and Markowitsch 2021 for details). Examples of this scenario are most likely to be seen in Switzerland, where the majority of youth pass through a prestigious apprenticeship system and a distinct higher VET sector is developing. In this scenario, apprenticeships for adults in the sense of initial training will remain a minority programme, unless new apprenticeship degrees at higher levels are created.

⁴² Learners are able to complete work-based learning through apprenticeship training, based on a fixed-term contract with an employer, or complete it in the form of training agreements, without a contractual employment relationship (Virolainen 2021).

▶ 5.3 Adult apprenticeships and lifelong learning policy

The aim of this paper was to bring together research and policies on apprenticeships with those on adult learning. We have looked at the many opportunities offered by apprenticeships and related forms of (certified) work-based learning for older adults by distinguishing between various typical needs and tasks: for instance, to obtain a vocational qualification in order to move up a career step; to complete additional training to support a job change or re-entry into the labour market; to find an alternative to senior studies. Thus, we aimed to overcome the limited perspectives available and produce new ideas that go beyond the usual emphasis on the importance of lifelong learning.

This conclusion is not the place to repeat the importance of strengthening lifelong learning and adult education in an ageing society. Instead, we will conclude with some concrete suggestions on the possible next steps in research and at the level of international cooperation by first re-emphasizing and clarifying some of the policy messages made in the previous chapters and then adding some new ones. Before doing so, we will summarize the essential elements for adapting apprenticeships to the reskilling and upskilling of adults and older workers based on our prior analysis:

- ▶ Educational opportunities need to be flexible to the needs and demands of adults. They need to enable education to be combined with the responsibilities of adult life, for example by approaches including modularization, distance learning⁴³ and part-time provision.
- ▶ For any route that builds on informal and non-formal learning, it is essential that the acquired skills are visible, recognized and lead to the acquisition of formal qualifications that are valued in the labour market (validation and recognition of prior learning).
- ▶ Irrespective of the route taken (regular apprenticeship, shortened apprenticeship or RPL) it is essential that proper forms of skill assessment are in place. Moreover, by making the skills already achieved visible, educational provisions can be better tailored and repetitive study tasks can be avoided.
- ▶ For phases of full-time education for adults, financial and non-financial support mechanisms are required (for example, training leave, grants, counselling, child care and health insurance). In addition, participating in education should not harm social protection coverage, including unemployment benefits.
- ▶ In all forms of public funding conceived and implemented for adult apprentices, socially disadvantaged groups must always be given significantly more support, as inequality would otherwise be exacerbated.
- ▶ To keep track of the extended learning journeys required for successful upskilling, adults require proper counselling about the opportunities at hand and the ways to overcome difficulties along the way (lifelong career guidance).
- ▶ Finally, poorly-qualified and low-skilled adults may need support in finding out about the opportunities at hand (awareness-raising campaigns, guidance), in entering a scheme (educational outreach), and in being able to stay in the routes of progression until they can reap the benefits of their individual commitments (which are often substantial).

⁴³ For digital learning solutions for apprentices, see the ILO publication on ADULT paper: Digital Transformation of Apprenticeships: Emerging Opportunities and Barriers

The problem is certainly not a lack of strategy or vision related to adult learning. The now lengthy history of lifelong learning offers a multitude of blueprints, and there is hardly a country that does not have a current lifelong learning strategy or national skills strategy (Holford et al. 2008; Milana, Holford and Špolar 2017). These partly interchangeable strategies are usually already very comprehensive and therefore leave little room for fundamentally new approaches. The problem instead is that many of these strategies are simply not implemented.

Suggestions for future actions regarding adult apprenticeships

The problem is also not a lack of good ideas or good examples. On the contrary, as our brief analysis has shown, there is a wide variety of approaches and funding opportunities for adult learning. Cedefop in particular has pioneered the development of a European database of relevant funding instruments (Cedefop 2020a) in recent years. Although it has yet to be extended to non-European countries, it is not to be expected that expanding this collection of more than 200 instruments will identify entirely new types of support. However, as our analysis has also shown, there is very limited empirical evidence with regard to what works in other contexts, and generalisable insights into the effectiveness and efficiency of public support measures to promote adult apprenticeship hardly exist. This, however, is not to say that good experiences with individual solutions are not helpful.

Essentially, there are two problems: the lack of hard, empirical evidence of public support efforts and the difficulty in exchange of knowledge of individual good practices. Both can be best addressed at the international level. On the one hand, more comparative international research on funding instruments is required; on the other hand, international cooperation on apprenticeship needs to be strengthened. It is a matter of providing inspiration for change, objective information and experience, as well as support structures for using this experience (for example, in the form of peer learning). The Apprenticeship Support Services⁴⁴ of the European Commission offers a possible role model for international cooperation in this respect.

Based on our analysis and in addition to the key messages already made in the previous chapters, we recommend:

- Re-examining the apprenticeship quality frameworks of international organizations, such as the European framework for quality and effective apprenticeships (EFQEA), the ILO's Apprenticeship Toolkit, etc., with regard to the extent to which they explicitly refer to adult learning and disadvantaged learners and adhere to principles of lifelong learning and revise them if necessary.⁴⁵ Simultaneously, adult learning needs to be explicitly acknowledged in the ILO's upcoming standards on apprenticeships.⁴⁶
- Encouraging and supporting national governments to make sure that apprenticeship for adults is stated explicitly as an option for upskilling and re-skilling in their national strategies for lifelong learning and skills, and eventually also in broader economic and political strategies such as those aiming at greener economies.

⁴⁴ The services support EU Member States in improving their apprenticeship schemes with three pillars: knowledge-sharing, networking and benchlearning.

⁴⁵ A good starting point for this would be Markowitsch and Chan's "Elucidating Responsiveness: Reviewing Empirical Methods for Comparative Studies of Governance in Vocational Education and Training" and Cedefop's EFQEA Implementation: A Cedefop Analysis and Main Findings. How Schemes in Cedefop's European Database on Apprenticeship Schemes Compare with EFQEA Criteria.

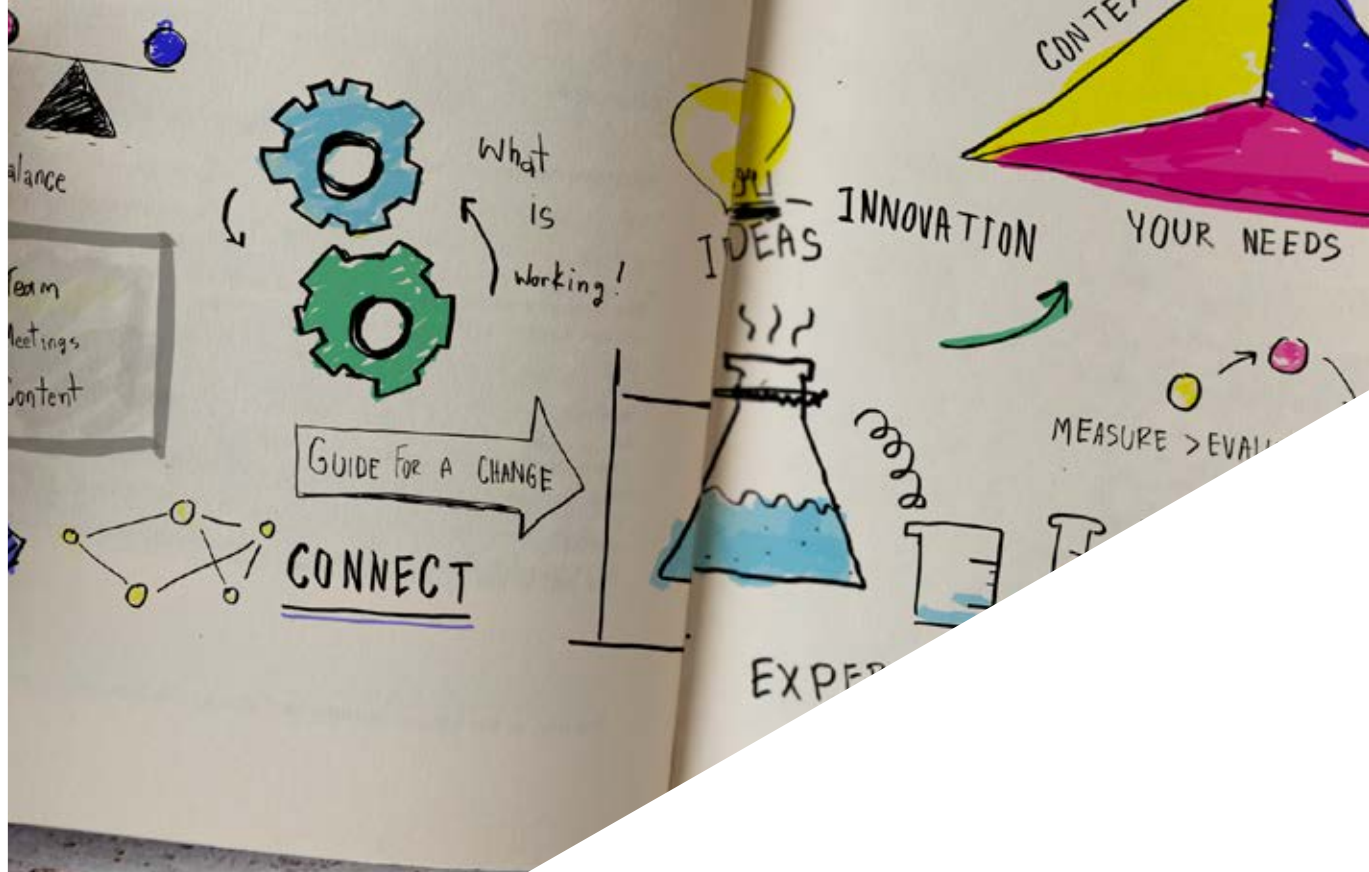
⁴⁶ A survey collecting views of Member States to prepare the standard asked about "the extent to which the normal duration of the apprenticeship could be reduced on the basis of any prior learning or progress made during the apprenticeship" (Q21e) and whether special account needs to be taken of the situation of older persons (Q32c). For more details, refer to the ILO's "A framework for quality apprenticeships", 2021.

- ▶ Encouraging and supporting social partners to secure high-quality jobs and workplaces, which are pre-conditions for quality apprenticeships, and to foster measures to overcome gender inequality and other forms of discrimination in apprenticeship training (see also ILO's work on decent work and job quality).
- ▶ Extending existing collections of co-funding instruments for adults (for example, the one currently hosted by Cedefop) to the global level (for example, in cooperation with the ILO), considering the different contexts of high-, medium- and low-income countries.
- ▶ Conducting cross-country meta-evaluations of funding instruments for adult learning and adult apprenticeships to gain evidence of what works and in which contexts.⁴⁷
- ▶ Build up a global apprenticeship support network with a particular focus on small and micro-enterprises and on low- and medium-income countries to complement the work done by GAN (the Global Apprenticeship Network) and the European Alliance for Apprenticeships (EAfA) in Europe.
- ▶ Initiating action research projects at the company level to pursue solutions for transforming reactive apprenticeships and training cultures into expansive ones.
- ▶ Improving international data on adult apprenticeship by including information on enrolments in work-based learning by age in the UOE data collection.

Finally, we need to re-emphasize that improving and adapting apprenticeships for adults for the purpose of reskilling and upskilling clearly goes beyond the purview of skills policies. For adult learning to become a vehicle for social mobility, the constraints that adults, and particularly less educated people, are facing from engaging in learning need to be overcome. While part of this might be achieved in terms of wages and funding (as discussed above), other conditions such as affordable childcare are equally important. Hence, for retraining and adult learning, a more integrated approach to policy-making is needed. For example, the agenda to move towards a greener economy could also have adult training as one of several components that build on each other.

⁴⁷ Currently there is no cross-country research available in this area. The cost-benefit comparison between Germany, Austria and Switzerland (Dionisius et al. 2008, Moretti et al. 2017, Muehleman and Wolter 2019) as well as a European review of ALMP measures (Card, Kluge, and Weber 2017) are however good starting points.

Case Study



6

Case Study

► Case Study 1

The role of adult apprenticeship in lifelong learning, Finland

Introduction: Why the Finnish apprenticeship system is a good international case (though the Finns might disagree)

The current Finnish apprenticeship system constitutes only a small part within a strong school-based VET system, which has been the dominant model of VET in Finland for a long time. Currently, more than two thirds of all Finnish students at the upper-secondary level are enrolled in vocational education, but only one quarter of them are in apprenticeship training (compared to at least half or more in Austria, Germany, Switzerland, Denmark and the Netherlands, according to UOE statistics). In principle, apprenticeships and school-based VET have offered parallel routes to vocational qualifications in the Finnish VET system. However, compared to other countries with well-established apprenticeship systems, apprenticeship training in Finland has become an educational pathway mainly for adults (see figure 2 below) and is considered to be a second-chance education steered by labour and employment rather than education policy.

Apprenticeship training in Finland is certainly not regarded as a good international practice by the Finns themselves. Despite a clear legal framework, the goals and the target group of the Finnish apprenticeship system have not always been clear. Its added educational value has been questioned and “its educational meaning was not always recognized by the actors, including apprentices, trainers or employers” (Rintala 2020, 5). The current role of apprenticeships in supporting lifelong learning and the gaining of qualifications or the securing of employment for adults is hardly recognized as a strength of the Finnish VET system. On the contrary, there is constant discussion of how to change the nature of apprenticeship training (especially the wage structure) to make it better suited for youth or, more precisely, for employers who do not wish to pay almost a full wage to someone still learning the tricks of the trade.

Why is it nevertheless interesting to have a closer look at the Finnish apprenticeship system? From the perspective of lifelong learning and adult education, there are at least three reasons why it is an interesting case.

1. Why is the apprenticeship route in Finland mainly taken by adults despite the fact that it is offered also to young people and was previously taken predominantly by the young?

Tracing historical developments and the reasons that led to the decline of the Finnish apprenticeship system provides a better understanding of which VET provisions are attractive to younger and older people and how an apprenticeship system holds up alongside a school-based VET system. We will look at the origins of the Finnish Apprenticeship system and its main critical junctures, and how those have affected the apprenticeship population.

2. What does an apprenticeship system that is committed to the principles of lifelong learning look like and how does it position itself within a school-based VET system?

Through various recent reforms, the Finnish VET system has become more work- and competence-oriented and has steadily incorporated more principles of lifelong learning. For instance, the legislation for youth and adult vocational education was unified under one law in 2015–2018. We will discuss the key elements of these reforms and how they have affected the apprenticeship system.

3. In what form and to what extent does apprenticeship training for young people and adults need to differ in an education system that has largely abolished age limits?

Currently, apprenticeship training has a minor role to play as an educational pathway for youth, and employers seem to favour adult apprentices with work experience. Regardless, apprenticeship training has been also promoted and marketed to youth, sometimes specifically to those disaffected with school (Kivinen and Peltomäki 1999; Mazenod 2016). In an open and flexible education system that offers diverse routes for young people and adults alike, the different needs of younger and older people (for example, the ways they learn or need financial support) nevertheless persist. We will scrutinize how these needs are taken into account in the current Finnish system.

Quick facts on Finland and the Finnish apprenticeship system

Finland is one of the world's most northern and geographically remote countries and forms a symbolic northern border between western and eastern Europe. Formerly part of Sweden and later of the Russian Empire, Finland gained independence in 1917, joined the European Union in 1995, and adopted the euro in 1999.

The economy of Finland is highly industrialized, with a per capita output similar to that of other western European economies. The largest sector of the economy is the services sector (73 per cent) followed by manufacturing. The largest industries are electronics, machinery, vehicles and other engineered metal products, forest industry and chemicals.

The population of Finland is approximately 5.5 million. The size of the country's working age population will decrease in the years to come due to an increasing rate of retirement and despite people staying at work longer. Finland has relatively low immigration, but numbers are growing.

According to Eurydice, a key feature of the national education culture is ensuring equal opportunities for all, with a particular focus on lifelong learning, making it possible for learners to take up studies at any stage of their lives. Differences between schools are small and the quality of teaching is high all around the country. The education system does not have any dead ends that would affect an individual's learning career.

Education for adults is provided at all levels, and adult learning is very popular. In addition, informal and non-formal education are recognized. Different institutions offer a great variety of courses and programmes for adults and the provision of liberal adult education is extensive. In 2017, over 27 per cent of Finnish adults participated in adult education, compared to an EU average of 11 per cent.

In 2019, 40 per cent of all students chose vocational education after compulsory education, whereas 54 per cent continued in general education. The VET system is predominantly school-based and has experienced a remarkable growth in enrolments over the past two decades. The adoption of lifelong learning policies promoted the abolition of dead ends and the development of opportunities for transitioning from VET to higher education. Most young learners still complete their upper secondary vocational qualifications at vocational schools, but such qualifications may also be completed through apprenticeship training and through competence-based examination, mainly for adults.

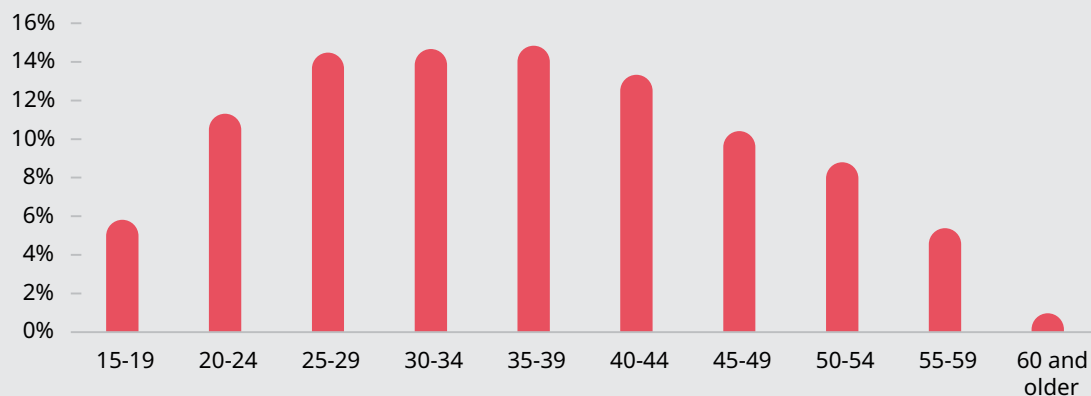
Finnish apprenticeship training is an established part of the VET system in Finland, which provides around 160 different vocational qualifications. Through apprenticeship training, it is possible for both young people and adults to complete initial vocational qualifications, further vocational qualifications and specialist vocational qualifications at ISCED levels 3–4 and EQF levels 4–5. VET graduates, including apprenticeship graduates, have general eligibility for further studies at polytechnics and universities (eligibility requirements may vary from one programme to another).

An apprenticeship is based on a fixed-term contract between the student and the employer. Apprentices are full-time workers and receive wages that are collectively set, typically at about 80 per cent of the wages of a skilled worker. Employers receive subsidies if an apprentice is an unemployed jobseeker.

The duration of apprenticeship is not fixed. In addition, since 2018 there are no regulations governing what has to be learned at the workplace and what has to be learned in other environments (at the institution, by online learning, etc.). The forms and time of training are based on a personal competence development plan. (School-based VET programmes are usually three-year programmes and include six months of practical training in a genuine working environment; however, no minimum or maximum time is set for work-based learning in school-based programmes).

Roughly 20 to 25 per cent of the 250,000 VET learners in Finland are apprentices (2017: 19 per cent; 2018: 26 per cent) according to Statistics Finland⁴⁸. The majority of apprentices are adult learners (see age distribution in figure 1).

Figure 2. New entrants in apprenticeship training by age group in Finland, 2018



Source: Authors' calculation based on Education Statistics Finland and Rintala (forthcoming)

The decline of the traditional Finnish apprenticeship and its transformation into an upskilling pathway for adults

As in many other countries, the origin of the apprenticeship system in Finland goes back to the guild system. For many children of poor rural families, an apprenticeship in a handicraft was the only professional option besides farm work, with the prospect of an independent income and life as a master craftsman. When crafts developed into small-scale industries during industrialization, the guild and apprenticeship system began to break down. Apprentices became unskilled factory workers, and an apprenticeship became mainly a means to employ underaged workers. However, even at this early stage, the marginalized Finnish apprenticeship system became part of the employment system. With the advances in industry and technology, "higher" VET began to also be expected for children of the growing middle-class. However, the type of dual training developing in continental Europe did not take root in Finland (Kivinen and Peltomäki 1999, 76).

In 1923, the first Apprenticeship Act was passed with the aim of extending the apprenticeship system to industry, but employers remained reluctant and the Act was eventually declared a failure. Employers saw too much bureaucracy (for example, the difficulty of terminating an apprenticeship or arranging for the

⁴⁸ Reforms in 2018 (see further below) abolished the minimum length for apprenticeship training, and now apprenticeships are used for shorter periods of time (e.g., summer jobs). Therefore, the number of apprenticeships has increased and is now not fully comparable to the earlier numbers.

theoretical part of it), they lacked motivation for teaching apprentices, and the authorities themselves lacked the capacities required to supervise the system. According to Kivinen and Peltomäki (1999), such challenges plagued apprenticeship training right up to the 1990s.

Given these experiences, it is not surprising that Finland turned in favour of a classroom-based VET system after World War II, to meet the growing demand for skilled labour. With the strengthening of the welfare state in the Nordic countries and the demands for equal educational opportunity, the institutionalization and centralization of schooling under the public sector was cemented. Following the Vocational Institutions Act in 1958, numerous municipal vocational schools were founded and became symbols of equality and of the progress of modern industry (Kivinen and Peltomäki 1999, 78), while the apprenticeship system further deteriorated and the share of apprentices among full-time VET students declined between the 1960s and 1980s (Stenström and Virolainen 2014, 2018). Apprenticeships were thought to be particularly appropriate as an alternative for those who had not applied or been accepted for the school-based vocational training in institutions, those affected by “restructuring problems”, “unwilling students” and other marginal groups (Kivinen and Peltomäki 1999, 80). Between 1981 and 1993, the share of the under-20-year-olds among new apprenticeship entrants decreased from over 50 per cent to less than a few percent.

Further tensions in the labour market in the 1990s finally led to a re-assessment of the weakened education–employment link. A central debate emerged over which skills are best taught in the classroom and which can best be learned through the practical experience of working life. A new Apprenticeship Act was passed in 1992, aiming “to improve the status of apprenticeship training as a work-oriented form of training in an otherwise mainly institutional vocational education system” (Kivinen and Peltomäki 1999, 80). Under the new Act, apprenticeships can be used when an employee lacks vocational training or formal qualifications (reskilling), when a job broadens to include new tasks (upskilling), or when an employee wants his or her vocational skill verified (RPL). Further, it was hoped that the apprenticeship training would help unemployed people, unskilled people and young people at risk of marginalization in finding jobs (Kivinen and Peltomäki 1999).

Against this background and the fact that subsidies have been used to increase the number of apprenticeship places in Finland, it is a little surprising to note that there is a direct correlation between unemployment figures and the number of apprentices in the period from 1970 to 1995, as Kivinen and Peltomäki have found. Such a correlation is quite odd from the perspective of other countries’ apprenticeship systems, as apprenticeship numbers usually tend to decline when unemployment rises.

In the 2000s, VET in Finland grew more popular for several reasons: upper secondary VET has clearly been developed with more of a focus on the world of work, by strengthening WBL; there have been several campaigns to improve the image of VET; national skills competitions as part of WorldSkills have further increased the popularity of VET; and most importantly, the eligibility of VET students for higher education was guaranteed by the reforms of 1993, and new, attractive, higher education opportunities were created with the establishment of polytechnics.

However, apprenticeship training has continued to make up only a marginal share of the education provisions for young people. Apprenticeship training is largely used in retraining, continuing education and further education for adults.⁴⁹ For this reason, the Ministry of Education and Culture initiated a development programme for 2014-2016, whose objective was to increase the provision of apprenticeship training for young people and to develop models that combine institution-based and apprenticeship-based education (see next section). Hence, contrary to many other countries, the challenge in Finland is not how open the apprenticeship system is to adults but how it can be more attractive to young people.

⁴⁹ In this context, it is important to note that Finland, like other Nordic countries, generally has a robust adult education system. Participation both in formal and non-formal learning is far above the EU average. As in the other Nordic countries, the formal education participation rate in Finland is above 10% (the EU average is 5%), and more than 80% of those who hold an ISCED level 4 qualification have achieved it during adulthood (European Commission, EACEA and Eurydice 2021).

Reforming the Finnish VET system into a lifelong learning system and the implications this has for apprenticeship training

The popularity of VET in general, but also apprenticeship training in particular, has increased remarkably in Finland over the past two decades. In fact, the vocational drift at the upper secondary level in Finland has been the strongest among all the EU Member States during this period (Cedefop 2020b). Part of the reason for this development has been the continuous modernization of the VET system into a pluralistic and flexible lifelong learning system since the early 1990s. Thus, it is worth looking more closely at how the relationship between IVET (initial VET) and CVET (continuing VET) is organized, how adult apprenticeship is positioned within the overall lifelong learning system, and which changes have enabled the current system. Does the Finnish approach provide a realistic way to materialize a future vision of VET as lifelong learning that provides equal learning opportunities for everyone irrespective of age? What are the strengths and weaknesses of this approach?

To understand the Finnish approach to a modern VET system and the role of adult apprenticeships as part of it, two development processes are crucial: (a) the strengthening of work-based learning and the realization of a “competence-based” VET system that allows for different ways of acquiring skills and (b) the abolition of the separation of IVET and CVET and the creation of an integrated system. Various educational reforms over the past 25 years or so have made this possible. We turn to the most important ones next.

A. Introducing competence-based education: The reforms of 1994

In 1994, the so-called competence-based qualifications system was established to address the needs of adult learners (Stenström and Virolainen 2018, Stenström and Virolainen 2015). This system has enabled learners to earn their vocational degrees (initial vocational qualifications, further vocational qualifications and specialist vocational qualifications at levels EQF4–5) by demonstrating skills that they have acquired through working life and allowed working-age adults to gain vocational qualifications without necessarily attending formal training. Essentially, it was a new form of modularized assessment (independent of the source of competency) that took some years to be fully implemented (Virolainen 2021).

These reforms are said to have had the most significant impact on the different educational paths in Finland (Kokkonen 2018). Skills demonstration became a flexible way of obtaining vocational qualifications and has put an increased emphasis on vocational skills and work-based learning in vocational upper-secondary qualifications (Haltia 2006; Stenström and Laine 2006; Rääkköläinen 2011; Virtanen 2013; and Räisänen and Rääkköläinen 2014). Along with offering wider eligibility for higher education, the reforms helped to increase the popularity of VET in Finland and improved its position in the Finnish educational system.

Adult apprenticeship benefited from these reforms in two ways. On the one hand, the reforms laid the foundation for a situation where skills acquired at work could be valued more highly than they were before and could ultimately be equal in rank to skills acquired at school; on the other hand, they opened the doors to an “age-neutral” education system, which was finally accomplished 25 years later with another set of reform, to which we turn next.

B. Abolishing the separation of youth and adult VET: The reforms of 2018

The system of competence-based education has been enhanced more recently by a new set of VET reforms that took place in 2017–2018 and which aimed at increased flexibility for further combining school-based and work-based learning pathways (Finnish National Agency of Education 2019). Since then, it has been possible for students, when completing VET qualifications, to combine

“ordinary” training at the workplace and apprenticeship training in their vocational qualifications. In other words, learners are able to complete work-based learning through apprenticeship training, based on fixed-term contracts with their employers, or to complete it through the use of training agreements, without contractual employment relationships (Virolainen 2021).⁵⁰

Each student and apprentice has a personal competence development plan drafted for their studies, including credits for prior learning, and their study time may vary according to the personal study plan. Up until 2018, upper-secondary school-based VET lasting three years usually included six months of instruction at the workplace (on-the-job learning). With the new VET reforms, there is no minimum or maximum time set for workplace learning in school-based VET. Such personalized approaches help to avoid overlapping studies and shorten the study period. This keeps training more flexible and suited to learners’ needs – something that is particularly important for adults.

Theoretically, in the current Finnish VET system, school-based VET and apprenticeships are officially parallel learning pathways, as they follow the same national qualification requirements. Instead of final examinations to assure a common standard, competence is demonstrated and assessed in practical tasks during workplace learning. However, despite being “officially” equal, the two learning pathways – school-based VET with on-the-job learning periods (via a training agreement) and apprenticeship training – cannot be considered the same, as learners’ experiences of workplace learning and vocational identities clearly differ (Haapakorpi 2017; Rintala and Nokelainen 2020).

Besides the improved flexibilization, the reforms have introduced another important element into a vocational training-oriented lifelong learning system. The separate legislation for youth and adult vocational education was abolished by the reforms of 2018 (Laki ammatillisesta koulutuksesta [the Vocational Education and Training Act] 531/2017). Before 2018, there was a distinction between initial VET and adult VET, with the main difference being that VET for youth was school-orientated whereas adult VET was based on demonstration of vocational skills.⁵¹ Another difference was that those who completed competence-based qualification had no opportunity to include the common, general studies as part of their qualifications. The latest reforms unified the legislation for youth and adult vocational education under one law. Also, as part of the reforms, the total number of qualification degrees decreased. However, as students may adjust their studies individually, the total number of qualifications provided does not capture the variety that exists within degrees/individual learning pathways.

The reforms of the Finnish VET system have fulfilled two central demands of lifelong learning, at least on paper. The first was to open up the education system in such a way that it could offer suitable entry and exit opportunities for people at different stages of their lives. The second demand was to enable different learning paths and the recognition of learning achievements regardless of the learning path. The role of WBL and the question of whether or not a particular pathway is understood as apprenticeship training have essentially become matters of contracts and financial support rather than of didactical approach. It remains to be seen to what extent the history of apprenticeships targeting predominantly disadvantaged groups will continue in the future.

⁵⁰ “Training agreements” have replaced the former “on-the-job learning periods” in school-based VET.

⁵¹ In Finland, the government specifies education policies and their regulations (i.e., laws, decrees and acts). The present legislation guiding the organization of initial VET and adult VET was enacted in 1998 (Law on initial vocational education and training 630/1998; Law on adults’ vocational education and training 631/1998). The law for initial VET that was adopted then has been modified and changed several times since – for example, in 2011 and 2014 (Law on changing the law on vocational education and training 951/2011; 787/2014). Since the present legal framework was adopted in 1998 and the law has been partially amended multiple times since then, the law text as such has become somewhat fragmented. An additional point to note is that the laws for vocational youth education and adult education were separate entities earlier (Law on initial vocational education and training 630/1998; Law on adults’ vocational education and training 631/1998) (Virolainen 2017).

Ongoing challenges and lessons learned

The reforms of 2018 have already been widely criticized, in particular for the budget cuts they entailed. In addition, the potential replacement of apprenticeship trainings (i.e. employment contracts) with traineeships (i.e. training agreements) has raised public discussion (Virolainen 2017).

Further, the high prevalence of formal learning has also been criticized as a persistent challenge of Finnish CVET, along with gaps in the provisions between low skills and high skills, the limited availability of short courses, the limited use of the evidence-based approach for steering provisions as well as the current system's lack of overarching strategy (OECD 2020). Regarding adults with low skills, there are further challenges: the capacity of existing advice and guidance services is low, targeted provisions for adults with low skills are close to non-existent, and there are limited outreach activities, according to a recent OECD report.⁵²

Despite this criticism and the future challenges, there is a lot to learn from the recent and older history of the Finnish apprenticeship system:

- ▶ Apprenticeships for upskilling and reskilling adults and the unemployed can become an important complementary part of an integrated school-based IVET system.
- ▶ A firm position of the apprenticeship system can be achieved by integrating it into the overall VET system rather than positioning it in competition to school-based VET.
- ▶ The reasons why apprenticeship programmes may be predominantly used by either young people or adults are to be found in historical developments and are linked to both skills and welfare policies, and also to demography, economic developments and other factors. In Finland, the main arguments for expanding or limiting apprenticeships today remain similar to those used in the past.
- ▶ The more apprenticeships are considered an instrument of social policy and labour policy instead of education policy, the more adult apprentices can be expected.
- ▶ Periods of recession and high unemployment allow for a strengthening of the 'social goals' of apprenticeship, and periods of growth and skill demand allow for a strengthening of the 'educational goals' of apprenticeships (as the transformation of the Finnish apprenticeship system in the second half of the twentieth century has shown).
- ▶ Acknowledging and strengthening work-based learning in school may also have positive effects on apprenticeship training in terms of its reputation and attractiveness, as the reforms of 1994 have shown.
- ▶ Individualized and learner-centred approaches are beneficial in adult education and seem to be equally relevant for IVET (as proved by the latest Finnish reforms).
- ▶ A lifelong learning approach implies offering youth and adults the same qualifications and pathway opportunities, regardless of how they are actually pursued.

⁵² The OECD's 2020 report titled *Continuous Learning in Working Life in Finland* identifies the following key challenges: (1) There are some gaps in learning provisions, including limited upskilling opportunities for adults with vocational qualifications and, more generally, limited availability of short courses relevant to the labour market; (2) Finland has the largest gaps in learning participation between adults with low basic skills and those with higher skill levels amongst OECD economies, as it offers little targeted support for adults with low skills, whether in terms of outreach activities, advice and guidance services, or specific training programmes.

► Case Study 2

Artisan recognition of prior learning, South Africa

Why is the ARPL in South Africa an interesting international case?

This case study focuses on the administration of an artisan RPL process by a private company named PiCompany SA, with expertise in RPL.⁵³ The main aim of its practice is the upskilling and eventual certification of adults with years of experience in their trades through what is called an artisan RPL process. The company recruits potential candidates, prepares their portfolios of evidence⁵⁴ and forwards them (if eligible for ARPL) to an accredited trade test centre, where they undertake an assessment known as a trade test. If successful, they are certified as qualified artisans (more details on the process are provided further below). After successfully passing the test and getting the certificate, participants are entitled to be paid a higher salary as regulated in some instances by collective labour agreements. It can be argued that while employers would certainly prefer to employ non-certified artisans to be able to pay them less, larger companies require their subcontractors to provide certified artisans.⁵⁵ The practice described is less relevant for self-employed artisans, as they primarily work for individual households.

The ARPL is an interesting international case, firstly as it covers a broad range of occupations (more than 100) including bricklayer, electrician, boilermaker, plumber, mechanic, carpenter and joiner, welder, hairdresser, pastry cook, etc.⁵⁶ Secondly, as there is wide agreement that South Africa produces too few artisans to meet the needs of the economy, the case provides insight into dealing with mid-level skills shortages in specific trades. Of note is the fact that RPL is only one among several routes to obtain an artisan certificate (see the next section), but this route is particularly relevant for adult learners since it is applicable to employees who have several years of work experience in the artisanal field with little or no formal academic training.⁵⁷ Thirdly, the case study is interesting also due to the specific meaning associated with RPL in the South African context – namely, one of its objectives is “to accelerate the redress of past unfair discrimination in education, training and employment opportunities”.⁵⁸ The latter can be linked to the legacies of apprenticeship training in the country (see the next section). Finally, about 30 per cent of the ARPL candidates recruited by PiCompany are women, mostly in welding.

The case study is structured into the following sections: historical background, briefly describing the relationship between the South African apprenticeship system and the artisan skills development; aims and objectives, focusing on the overall objective of the ARPL; activities, describing the ARPL process in general and the responsibilities of PiCompany SA in particular; and outcomes, provide insight into the extent to which the overall objectives of the practice have been met. Since the case study focuses on ARPL as a grassroots practice, the last two sections – strengths and weaknesses and lessons learnt – address the implementation level of the practice.

⁵³ PiCompany South Africa has in the past been involved in defining RPL practices and hurdles through a study trip to the Netherlands with Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETA) and the Department of Higher Education and Training, which resulted in a report that was used as an input for the ministerial task team on RPL.

⁵⁴ The Portfolio of Evidence includes a Curriculum Vitae (CV) and any other certified supporting documents of qualifications and current and previous employment together with the trade-related duties performed, as well as any photographic proof, where available.

⁵⁵ Based on an interview with a representative of PiCompany conducted by one of the co-authors of this report..

⁵⁶ The entire list is available in the Government of South Africa’s Gazette No. 35625, dated 31 August 2012.

⁵⁷ Data on the number (or share) of artisans that go through the RPL path is not publicly available.

⁵⁸ Section 5(1)(d) of the NQF Act adopted in 2008.

The South African apprenticeship system and the artisan skills development system

The revision of the ARPL system into a competency-based format “provided the opportunity to gain formal skills accreditation to the large number of people who had been forced to learn artisan skills informally due to the lack of apprenticeship opportunities during the apartheid years” (Prinsloo 2020, 25). The apprenticeship system in South Africa has closely been related to artisan skills development, i.e., in the 20th century apartheid state, apprenticeships were typically associated with “blue collar” or mid-level technical skills supporting the mining and industrial economy (ILO and the World Bank 2013). Also, apprenticeship used to be white-dominated model of learning (Kraak 2008, van Rensburg et al. 2012). In the 1990s, a trend towards “declining appreciation of the value of the artisan” (ILO and the World Bank 2013, 118) was observed as artisan training was associated with the apartheid system. For instance, education and training policy in the new democratic state did not focus on apprenticeship training; there was a steady decline in trade tests⁵⁹ arranged and in those succeeding, which pointed to a deterioration of artisanal skills supply (ILO and the World Bank 2013).

A gradual change in education and training policy (and also “revival” of the concept of apprenticeship training) was started through the launch of the Joint Initiative on Priority Skills Acquisition (JIPSA) in 2006, which promoted the expansion of intermediate artisan and technical skills as sine qua non for a growing economy. Following the JIPSA initiative, the 2013 National Development Plan (NDP) set a target to train 30,000 artisans per year by 2030 as it was recognized that re-establishing a good artisan training system is an urgent priority (DHET 2013a). In the context of growing demand for qualified and competent artisans, apprenticeships represent one of four routes to artisan training. Each of the routes requires a trade test for qualification in order to reach an artisan certification status. The various routes are outlined in the table below. It is expected that the ARPL route will expand in the future, and this can be related to changes made to admission criteria. For example, prior to 2016, artisans without a formal qualification were required to have four years of work experience in order to access an RPL process; in 2016, the number of years was reduced to three (DHET 2016).

Table 1. Routes to artisan qualification

| Route | Description |
|--|--|
| Apprenticeship | A period of structured workplace-based learning culminating in an occupational qualification for a listed trade |
| ARPL | Admission criteria include: at least three years of relevant verifiable work experience for a particular trade; ⁶⁰ the minimum years of work experience may be accumulated from various traceable employers or services provided to customers in the relevant trade |
| Learnership | A period of structured workplace-based learning culminating in an occupational qualification or part-qualification; this represents an alternative to apprenticeships and involves shorter periods of learning that can be completed in 12 months or less (for parts of qualifications that eventually make up a full artisan qualification) |
| Any other vocational or occupational programme | Allows for persons that learn through any other process, including a prescribed period of work experience, often an internship; this is a common route for persons from technical high schools or TVET colleges |

Source: Skills Development Act 1998 and DHET 2016.

⁵⁹ Certification as an artisan requires the individual to pass a trade test administered through an accredited trade test centre once he or she has received sufficient training.

Aims and objectives

The overall aim of ARPL is to increase access, via a trade test process, to a certification for all eligible persons. The ARPL is “an active pathway to a full artisan trade occupational qualification registered on the NQF-listed trades and provides for artisan trade qualification in all sectors of the economy, and sets national criteria and guidelines on the practice of ARPL in order to grant access to non-contracted learners to a national trade test both in the formal and informal sectors of the economy” (DHET 2016, 21). While the ARPL process provides an opportunity for acquiring a progressive range of skills through part qualifications, thus paving the path to becoming a semiskilled artisan, the candidates recruited by PiCompany SA aim for acquiring full qualifications, usually at NQF level 4⁶¹ after trade testing.

Activities

The ARPL process, which is government-regulated, includes the following four stages:⁶²

1. Application: Prospective ARPL candidates apply at an accredited trade test center (i.e., a centre accredited for the trade that is being applied for) to undergo an ARPL process. On application, the candidate will be assessed for compliance against the criteria and guidelines for the implementation of ARPL. If a candidate is in compliance with the guidelines, he/she will be assisted with the compilation of a portfolio of evidence (PoE).
2. Orientation: After applying for ARPL, the candidate is inducted together with other registered ARPL candidates, and they are informed about the purpose and process of ARPL, the documentation needed, and the related legislative framework. The candidates’ expectations are also discussed, along with ways to manage expectations.
3. Compilation of a PoE: The ARPL candidate compiles a PoE that includes a curriculum vitae (CV) and any other certified supporting documents of qualifications and current and previous employment, together with the trade-related duties performed any photographic proof, where available. All documents in the PoE must align with a checklist provided by the Assessment Quality Partner (AQP), currently the National Artisan Moderation Body (NAMB).
4. Assessment through technical evaluation panel: The panel comprises at least two persons, one of whom should be a qualified artisan in the same trade as the applicant. Panel members are approved and registered on a database as assessors and/or moderators with the NAMB, as per the requirements of the criteria and guidelines for the registration of artisanal trade assessors and moderators. The assessment is the actual trade testing; some providers have a registered (NAMB) trade test and do the trade testing inhouse, while others send candidates to the national government trade testing centre called Indlela.⁶³

PiCompany is involved in the overall project management and administration of ARPL cases. For example, it recruits potential candidates and forwards them to an accredited trade test centre⁶⁴ with which it collaborates. The trade test centre in this particular case is also a training provider (skills development

⁶⁰ Prior to the publication of Criteria and Guidelines for the Implementation of ARPL in 2016, four years of work experience were required for a person without formal qualifications (Skills Development Act 1998).

⁶¹ NQF level 4 is a matriculation certificate qualification (high school or vocational training) that provides access to university.

⁶² More information is available on the website of the South African government’s Department of Higher Education and Training.

⁶³ NAMB, as an AQP, is not allowed to test candidates.

⁶⁴ Trade test centres can be either private and accredited or public ones. They are managed by accredited assessors employed by private training providers or by public institutes.

provider),⁶⁵ meaning that if an artisan needs additional training (gap closure training) for the acquisition of a qualification, this can be easily arranged. The training is mostly funded by SETAs and there are no special adaptations (i.e., modular training, outside of working hours) other than to the content of the preparation for the trade test. For instance, the gap closure training is based on a pre-assessment conducted by the trade test centre. The pre-assessment identifies those learning outcomes from the respective trade in which the candidate is not yet competent and needs training. For instance, the results from the pre-assessment of an ARPL candidate in welding might conclude that the person “needs to do TIG welding and BUTT positions as s/he is not familiar with the procedures, and therefore three weeks’ gap closure is recommended for him/her”.⁶⁶ Usually, gap closure training (in cases managed by PiCompany) have a short duration, i.e., from 10 to 15 days on average.

Another responsibility of PiCompany is to ensure smooth connection and handling of the RPL cases, along with the SETAs⁶⁷ and the assessment quality partner, NAMB. NAMB recommends certification to the Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (QCTO), which is South Africa’s public entity responsible for quality assurance and the oversight of the design, accreditation, implementation, assessment and certification of occupational qualifications, part-qualifications and skills programmes. It is the only certification body in South Africa for occupational qualifications.

Since SETAs fund the RPL process of individuals, they have to approve them as eligible by going through their documentation. Candidates are approved through what is called a commencement letter. The budget allocated for a candidate to undergo the RPL process is on average 20,000 South African rand (equating approx. 1,184 euros). Funding is provided by the SETAs and covers compiling the necessary documentation (checking a candidate’s eligibility, including pre-assessment), attending an additional training (gap closure) if required, and a first trial at the trade test. If the attempt is unsuccessful, the candidate must pay for the second and following attempts themselves.

Outcomes⁶⁸

PiCompany has been involved in ARPL since 2018 and has administered 210 cases in total, thirty of which are still open. The education level of participants is mostly matriculation (corresponding to upper-secondary education in Europe). Participant ages are diverse (for example, between 26 and 50 years old); some of the candidates have been working between 10 and 20 years informally as electricians. One very interesting and uncommon outcome is that about 30 per cent of the artisans are women, mostly working in welding. This relates, on the one hand, to a focused drive from the government to encourage the certification of women in trades. On the other hand, women play an active role in the labour market in South Africa and also have a central position in taking care of the (extended) family.⁶⁹ In terms of employment status, 40 per cent of participants are employed and the rest are unemployed. Some additional facts to note include: the low drop-out rate (10 per cent) and the high success rate, i.e., around 80 per cent of participants manage to pass the trade test from the first trial and get a full qualification as a certified artisan. The COVID-19 pandemic has however caused delays of a couple of months in processing cases. There is currently another lockdown in South Africa, which is expected to result in further delays.

⁶⁵ Not all trade test centres are training providers. Training is mostly done by accredited private providers who have more up-to-date curricula and expertise than, for example, public TVET colleges.

⁶⁶ Based on documentation provided by the interviewee.

⁶⁷ An ARPL candidate needs to be approved by the SETA (for his/her particular trade) to undergo the RPL process.

⁶⁸ Data is based on estimations provided by PiCompany SA.

⁶⁹ Based on the interview.

Strengths and weaknesses

A major strength of the ARPL process is that it is very well-documented and state-regulated.

However, one weakness relates to the fact that, for example, SETAs do not always have the capacity to deal with the administrative work involved – they might need more time to approve the eligibility of a candidate, which causes delays. For example, if the issuing of a commencement letter (eligibility confirmation) is meant to take two months, in practice it might take up to six months. Also, SETAs are bureaucratic and are insistent on obtaining the confirmation letters from employers (to verify candidates' work experience), which might mean contacting one or several employer(s), leading to additional delays.

Once the trade test has been successfully passed by a candidate, it might take a couple of additional months (after sending all the documentation) to get the certificate from the QCTO. So roughly 1.5 years can pass before an adult artisan gets his/her official certification and is entitled to a higher salary.

Lessons learned

In view of the characteristics of the target group (adult artisans), one important lesson learned is the significance of the induction/orientation phase when PiCompany SA discusses with ARPL candidates their expectations and how to manage them. The creation of realistic expectations leads to a low drop-out rate. For example, it is crucial to inform participants that undergoing the ARPL process may need more time than initially estimated.

In the South African context, formalizing informal experience is very important from a labour market perspective, but also from a social justice viewpoint. While the ARPL process is "transparent" in terms of verifying each case through the compiled documentation, which is thoroughly checked by the competent authorities, improvements can be considered in terms of lowering the bureaucratic burden of the procedure and enabling a quicker ARPL process. The latter is particularly important in the case of older workers.

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