

WORK BASED LEARNING

A Leaflet of the Interagency Group on Technical and Vocational Education and Training



WHAT IS WORK-BASED LEARNING?

Work-based learning (WBL) refers to all forms of learning that occur in a real work environment. It equips individuals with the skills necessary to obtain, maintain and advance in their jobs and professional development. Common types of work-based learning include apprenticeships, internships, traineeships and on-the-job training. These often, but not always, combine workplace learning with classroom-based education.



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Apprenticeships

Apprenticeships are a key type of work-based learning, designed to develop occupational skills and lead to recognised qualifications. They combine school-based learning with workplace learning, with the latter typically accounting for a significant proportion (e.g. 50%) of the programme duration. This combination can vary in format, such as weekly rotations or extended block phases.

Apprentices often have an employment agreement, receive remuneration, and hold the status of employees.

EXAMPLE: The Swiss apprenticeship model is a classic example. The learner has an employment contract and is considered an employee. This upper secondary level programme lasts about three and a half years, with around 75% of the time spent learning at the workplace and 25% at a vocational school. Swiss companies advertise apprenticeship vacancies, and interested students apply directly. There is a training market where the supply of apprenticeship opportunities can meet the demand from students.

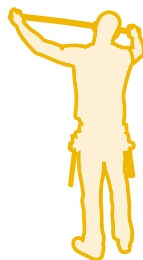
A signed training contract is required to start the apprenticeship programme, and this contract is valid throughout the training period. Apprentices are paid even during their time at vocational school. Typically, apprentices remain with one company for the entire duration of their training, which leads to a close connection between them and the company.



However, there are some apprenticeship programmes in which learners have student status, at least at the beginning of the programme and during the school phases. In these cases, the vocational education and training (VET) provider plays a leading role in organising and implementing the programme, mediating the relationship between the learner and the company. Initial enrolment takes place at the vocational school, which then provides support in finding suitable training companies. A contract between the company and the learner may not be required for admission; instead, a contract or an agreement between the school and the employer may govern the work-based learning component.

EXAMPLE: In Thailand, since 2008, secondary and post-secondary VET programmes can be delivered via a school-based pathway or one that includes in-company placements under the 'dual education mode'. In this model, the work-based learning component accounts for more than half of the programme duration, with learners spending 3-4 days at the workplace and 1-2 days at a VET institution, maintaining their student status. The training alternation arrangements depend on the agreements between industry, training institutions, students and parents.

In many countries, apprenticeship programmes are also referred to as **dual programmes**, because they take place at two different learning venues: the company and the school. Training is divided between school-based learning in vocational schools or centres, and work-based learning at a workplace. The term apprenticeship typically refers to the entire programme, but sometimes it specifically denotes the work-based learning component, which may also be called **practical training**.

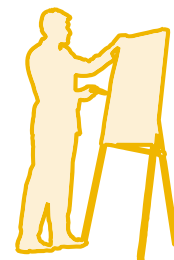


However, practical training might also occur in school workshops, centres or laboratories. In some countries, practical training is supplemented by training centres run by chambers, business associations or guilds, especially when small companies lack access to the latest technologies or cannot cover the full curriculum.

Dual programmes should not be confused with **dual systems**. This term refers to the overall governance structures (including financing) of vocational education and training, including the roles and responsibilities of various actors. In a dual system, key functions and tasks – such as developing training and examination standards, accrediting training companies, and conducting final examinations and certifications – are partly or wholly managed by employer and employee organisations (e.g. business associations, guilds, chambers, trade unions etc.).

Informal / traditional apprenticeships

Informal or traditional apprenticeships are common in developing countries. Their aim is similar to that of formal apprenticeships: to acquire the skills needed for a trade or craft through learning and working in a company. However, these apprenticeships often lack a connection to the formal education system, although they may include a classroom-based component. In some developing countries, formalising work-based learning practices remains a major challenge, as certification or formal qualifications are rarely awarded to apprentices.

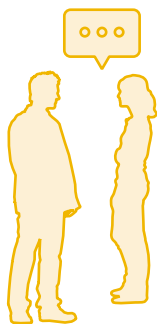


Informal/traditional apprenticeships are typically offered to young people by micro or small enterprises. Learning takes place on-the-job, side by side with an experienced craftsperson, traditionally referred to as a master craftsperson. The costs of training are shared between the employer and the apprentice, and they sometimes sign a training agreement that aligns with local norms and traditions.

EXAMPLE: In Tanzania, a young person, usually with a primary education level, agrees with a local master craftsperson in a skilled trade like carpentry, hairdressing, or car mechanics to be trained for several years under their supervision. Apprentices sometimes pay fees to be admitted, but usually receive in-kind or other allowances. Training is entirely work-based.

Internships and Traineeships

Internships are workplace training periods that complement formal or non-formal education and training programmes. Internships can be a compulsory and integrated, or optional and supplementary component of a vocational training programme. They may last from a few days or weeks to several months, but are generally shorter than apprenticeships. They may or may not include a work contract and payment. Other terms used for such workplace training periods include traineeship, attachment, work placement, and cooperative education (the latter term mainly used in Canada and the US). Generally, the terms internship and traineeship are used interchangeably.



EXAMPLE: In Rwanda, a one-month internship is included in all three years of upper secondary TVET programmes (TVET Certificate III-V) implemented at Technical Secondary Schools.

Internships/traineeships are also organised by public employment services in cooperation with employers to help unemployed or inactive young people gain employment. They consist of a period of work practice, whether paid or not, that includes a training component. The EU has established a Quality Framework for Traineeships as part of active labour market policies (ALMPs) in 2014. This framework recommends written agreements.

EXAMPLE: A university graduate who cannot find a job in their field of study registers for an active labour market programme, consisting of four months spent in a company and two months at a training provider.

There are also internships/traineeships offered in the open labour market. These are non-mandatory, bilateral agreements between an intern/trainee and a provider, without involvement from a third party or connection to the education and training system.

EXAMPLE: A young person after graduating from a school-based VET programme in the field of tourism, applies for a six-month internship/traineeship at a hotel to gain additional work experience with the aim of securing a first-entry job.



Other types of work-based learning

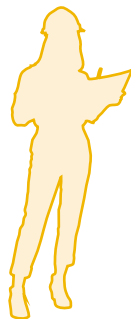
The most common type of work-based learning throughout an individual's working life is on-the-job training. This involves structured training – not just informal learning – that takes place at work.

EXAMPLE: A travel agency introduces new booking software, and its employees are trained on this software during working hours.

Other types of work-based learning include training firms, teaching factories, production schools or business units in vocational schools or centres.

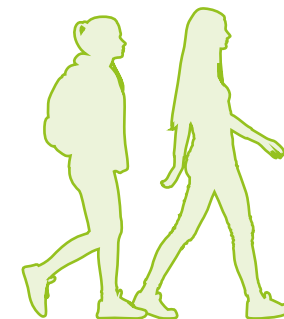
EXAMPLE: A TVET provider offers hospitality sector programmes that alternate between classroom-based training with practical training in a restaurant operated by the school, which is open to the public.

All forms of WBL, including apprenticeships, may be offered as active labour market programmes, if they are organised and funded by public employment services.

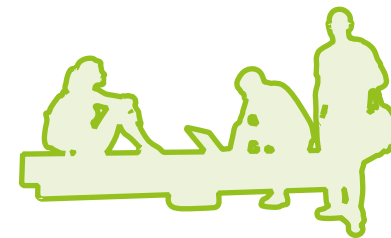


WHY IS WORK-BASED LEARNING IMPORTANT?

Work-based learning immerses learners, including adults, in real work settings. This helps the acquisition of practical and employability skills, enhancing their job readiness and facilitating a smoother transition from school to work. Additionally, work-based learning supports continuous skills development, ensuring learners have the competencies and mindsets necessary for lifelong learning.



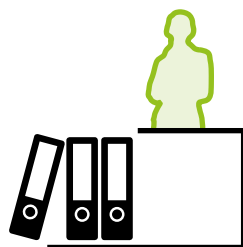
Work-based offers numerous benefits to various stakeholders...



Society

- Better access to jobs
- Better human and social capital
- Economic development
- Employment of less advantaged groups

...because it can lead to:

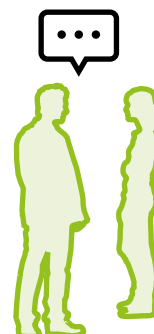


Learners

- Improved employability
- Faster school-to-work transitions
- Personal and professional development
- Attractive alternative to purely classroom-based learning

Employers

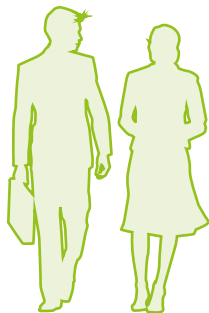
- Higher productivity
- Technical and job-specific skills
- Growth
- Efficient recruitment
- Social engagement and workplace diversity



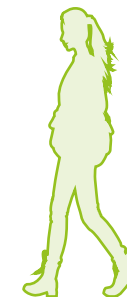
By aligning education and training with industry needs, work-based learning contributes to poverty reduction and the alleviation of economic inequality. It offers opportunities for individuals from underrepresented groups to enter and succeed in various industries. This fosters a more diverse and inclusive workforce and helps combat discrimination and bias in hiring practices.

Work-based learning guarantees access to a pool of skilled and motivated individuals, reducing recruitment costs. Employers can tailor work-based learning programmes to meet specific occupational and industry requirements, ensuring that participants develop skills and competences closely aligned with an organisation's objectives. This customisation leads to increased efficiency and effectiveness. Furthermore, employers benefit from higher productivity, as employees trained through work-based learning tend to have better technical and job specific skills. Work-based learning also enhances social engagement and workplace diversity, promoting a more inclusive and cohesive workplace environment.

Moreover, work-based learning significantly benefits the education and training sector, particularly TVET providers, by bridging the gap between TVET providers and employers. This gap may be cultural, institutional, technical, or physical. By closing this gap, TVET providers can:



- Continuously update their curricula with the latest industry trends, technologies, and practices, enhancing the relevance and quality of education.
- Reduce capital expenditure by making use of the employer's workshops, machinery, software, and other resources.
- Establish mutually beneficial relationships that extend beyond the work-based learning programme.
- Enhance reputation and credibility, attracting prospective students and contributing to financial sustainability and graduate employment.
- Upskill and reskill their teaching staff on an ongoing basis, allowing them to apply theoretical knowledge in real-world scenarios and improving teaching effectiveness.



INTERNATIONAL QUALITY STANDARDS FOR WORK-BASED LEARNING

Efforts to develop and strengthen apprenticeship systems and programmes at national, regional and local level are guided by international and supranational quality standards. Two key recommendations have been established in recent years to set criteria and standards for quality apprenticeships:

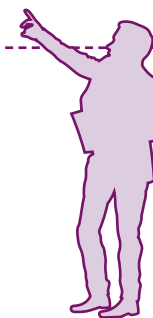
- **The European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships (EFQEA)** – Adopted by the European Union (EU) in 2018.
- **The Quality Apprenticeship Recommendation, 2023 (#208)** – Adopted by the International Labour Organization (ILO) in 2023.



Both of these recommendations share a common understanding of apprenticeships, as outlined in earlier sections: apprenticeships should be structured and provide learners with occupational skills and lead to recognised qualifications. They should combine workplace learning with vocational school education. Additionally, apprenticeships require a formal contract or training agreement, involve financial compensation for the apprentice and ensure that apprentices are protected.

The European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships

The Council Recommendation on a European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships aims to ensure that apprenticeship schemes are responsive to labour-market needs, while also providing tangible benefits to learners and employers alike (Council of the European Union, 2018). Developed with the support of the European social partners, this framework includes 14 criteria for high-quality and effective apprenticeships that lead to the development of job-related skills as well as the personal development of apprentices. These criteria are divided into two categories: learning and working conditions and framework conditions. The EU Member States are encouraged to use these criteria as guidelines for national regulations and the implementation of apprenticeships.



The European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships

Learning and working conditions

1. The rights and obligations of the apprentice, the employer and, where appropriate, the training institution should be set out in a written agreement.
2. Vocational institutions and the social partners should establish a comprehensive set of learning outcomes for each apprenticeship programme.
3. Pedagogical support should be available and provided by adequately qualified in-company trainers and vocational teachers.
4. There should be a substantial workplace component covering at least half of the apprenticeship duration.
5. Apprentices should be paid or otherwise compensated for their work.
6. Apprentices should be entitled to social protection, including necessary insurance.
7. Workplaces should comply with the relevant rules and regulations on work, health and safety conditions.

Framework conditions

8. A clear and consistent regulatory framework should be in place.
9. The social partners should be involved in the design, governance and implementation of apprenticeship programme.
10. Financial and/or non-financial support should be available, particularly for micro, small and medium-sized enterprises to enable cost-effective apprenticeships.
11. Flexible learning pathways and mobility of learners should be supported through recognition of prior non-formal and informal learning, opportunities for progression from apprenticeship to further learning, and opportunities for training abroad.
12. Career guidance for learners and awareness-raising activities to promote the attractiveness of apprenticeships should be in place.
13. Transparency of and access to apprenticeship opportunities in and between Member States should be facilitated by the national labour market agencies.
14. Quality assurance measures and procedures for tracking the employment and career development of apprenticeship graduates should be in place.

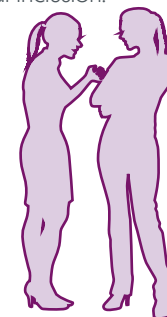
The ILO Quality Apprenticeships Recommendation

Recommendation No. 208 provides comprehensive guidance to ILO Member states, as well as employer and worker organisations, on developing, implementing and evaluating quality apprenticeship systems and programmes. The recommendation offers a clear definition of what apprenticeships are and emphasises the need for a robust regulatory framework for them.

Key aspects of this Recommendation include:

- Social Dialogue: Organisations of workers and organisations of employers play a crucial role in shaping apprenticeship systems and programmes through social dialogue and should be involved in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.
- Protection of apprentices: Apprentices should be protected from forced labour and child labour, discrimination and occupational safety and health hazards, and have the right to organize and benefit from collective bargaining. In addition, apprentices should benefit from adequate remuneration and fixed working hours, paid holidays as well as social security protection.
- Written agreement: Apprenticeships should be governed by a written agreement, clearly outlining the terms of the apprenticeship.
- Promotion of equality and inclusion: Member States should promote equality, diversity, and social inclusion within apprenticeship programmes, with a specific focus on gender equality.
- Collaboration and cooperation: The recommendation calls for measures to enhance international, regional, and national cooperation on apprenticeships, developed in consultation with representative employer and worker organisations.

Both the EFQEA and the ILO's Quality Apprenticeships Recommendation set a high standard for the development of apprenticeship systems and programmes, ensuring that they are beneficial for learners, employers, and society at large, and that they uphold principles of equality and social inclusion.



KEY SOURCES FOR FURTHER READING



EUROPEAN COMMISSION:

- ✓ [European Alliance for Apprenticeships](#)
- ✓ [EaFA Communities - Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#)
- ✓ [EaFA activities hub - Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#)

ETF:

- ✓ [Monitoring and evaluating work-based learning in vocational education and training 2021](#)
- ✓ [Financing work-based learning as part of vocational education reform: A handbook for policy makers and social partners 2018](#)
- ✓ [Work-based learning: How ready are we? A tool for ETF partner countries 2018](#)
- ✓ [Work-based learning: A handbook for policy makers and social partners in ETF partner countries](#)

CEDEFOP:

- ✓ [Cedefop European database on apprenticeship schemes](#)
- ✓ [Cedefop et al. \(2022\), Built to last: apprenticeship vision, purpose, and resilience in times of crisis: short papers from the Cedefop community of apprenticeship experts. Luxembourg: Publications Office. Cedefop working paper, No 12](#)



- ✓ [Cedefop \(2021\), The role of work-based learning in VET and tertiary education. Luxembourg: Publications Office. Cedefop research paper, No 80](#)
- ✓ [Cedefop \(2019\), Apprenticeship schemes in European countries: a cross-nation overview. Luxembourg: Publications Office](#)
- ✓ [Cedefop \(2019\), Cedefop's analytical framework for apprenticeships. Luxembourg: Publications Office](#)

ILO:

- ✓ [Recommendation 208](#)
- ✓ [ILO Apprenticeships topic page](#)
- ✓ [ILO Policy Brief \(2024\), Strengthening apprenticeships for transitions to formality](#)
- ✓ [Project page with publications - Apprenticeships Development for Universal Lifelong Learning and Training \(ADULT\)](#)

OECD:

- ✓ [OECD \(2023\), Building Future-Ready Vocational Education and Training Systems, OECD Reviews of Vocational Education and Training, OECD Publishing, Paris](#)
- ✓ [Flexible adult learning provision: what it is, why it matters and how to make it work \(2023\)](#)
- ✓ [OECD \(2019\), Getting Skills Right: Future-Ready Adult Learning Systems, Getting Skills Right, OECD Publishing, Paris](#)
- ✓ [OECD \(2018\), Seven Questions about Apprenticeships: Answers from International Experience, OECD Reviews of Vocational Education and Training, OECD Publishing, Paris](#)

UNESCO:

- ✓ [Transforming technical and vocational education and training for successful and just transitions: UNESCO strategy 2022-2029](#)
- ✓ [Recommendation concerning Technical and Vocational Education and Training \(TVET\), 2015](#)
- ✓ [Recommendation on Technical and Vocational Education and Training \(2015\): Results of the Second Consultation of Member States on the Implementation of the UNESCO TVET Recommendation, 2019-2022](#)

IAG-TVET:

- ✓ [The World Bank, UNESCO and ILO. \(2023\), Building better formal TVET systems: Principles and practice in low- and middle-income countries](#)
- ✓ [Cedefop et al. \(2022\), Work-based learning and the green transition. Luxembourg: Publications Office](#)
- ✓ [Cedefop and OECD \(2024\), Apprenticeships and the digital transition: modernising apprenticeships to meet digital skill needs. Publications Office of the European Union. Cedefop reference series; 125](#)
- ✓ [Cedefop; OECD \(2022\), Apprenticeships for greener economies and societies. Luxembourg: Publications Office. Cedefop reference series, 122](#)
- ✓ [Cedefop; OECD \(2021\), The next steps for apprenticeship. Luxembourg: Publications Office. Cedefop reference series; No 118](#)

The **Interagency Group on Technical and Vocational Education and Training** (IAG-TVET) was convened by UNESCO in 2008 to ensure a good coordination of activities by the key international organisations involved in the delivery of policy advice, programmes and research on TVET. It enhances knowledge-sharing and a common understanding of key issues. Ultimately, the group seeks to better leverage the work of each member organisation to help countries design and implement more effective TVET policies to improve productivity, economic prosperity, sustainable development and employment opportunities.

The IAG-TVET comprises the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), the World Health Organization (WHO) and the World Bank (WB). Regionally-based members include the African Development Bank (AfDB), the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the European Commission (EC), the European Training Foundation (ETF), the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop), the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB) and the Islamic Development Bank (IDB).