



# QUALITY APPRENTICESHIPS A COMMON APPROACH BY G20 COUNTRIES

AN L20 NOTE FOR  
THE G20 EMPLOYMENT TASK FORCE  
1-2 OCTOBER 2012\*

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## Introduction

**1** The G20 Employment Task Force Conclusions from May 2012 recommended to the G20 Employment Ministers that they “consider developing a common approach of G20 countries regarding apprenticeships” and “encourage social partners to provide suggestions to develop a G20 template for quality apprenticeship systems ...”<sup>1</sup>. The Ministers’ Conclusions in acknowledging the work of the Task Force agreed to “promote, and when necessary, strengthen quality apprenticeship systems that ensure high-level of instruction and adequate remuneration and avoid taking advantage of lower salaries” and “promote internships, on-the-job training, apprenticeships and professional experience”<sup>2</sup>.

**2** In their joint letter to President Calderón in advance of the Los Cabos Summit, the B20 and L20 stated “we ask the G20 governments to endorse action on urgent approaches to increasing apprenticeship and internship numbers. We suggest a joint and pilot programme be developed either at G20 level or with some voluntary countries to facilitate the recruitment of apprentices or students, including between different countries”. This was also reflected in both B20 and L20 recommendations to the Summit.

**3** The G20 Leaders’ Declaration from Los Cabos endorsed the recommendations of the Labour and Employment Ministers and also committed “to intensify our efforts to strengthen cooperation in education, skills development and training policies, including internship and on-the-job training, which support a successful school-to-

\*This note has been prepared by ITUC/TUAC secretariats.

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1 G20 Employment Task Force Conclusions of the G20 Strategies on Youth Employment (paragraph 8).  
2 G20 Labour and Employment Ministers’ Conclusions, Guadalajara, 17-18 May 2012 (paragraph 20).

work transition”<sup>3</sup>. The Leaders’ Declaration also stated “we appreciate the contribution of the Business-20 (B20) and Labour-20 (L20) to the process of the G20 under the Mexican Presidency”<sup>4</sup>.

**4** Given this strong mandate from the G20 Leaders and Labour and Employment Ministers as well as the support of the social partners, the L20 wishes to work with the Task Force and the B20 so as to implement a road map to achieve the ambitious objectives that have been set. The following provides key elements of quality apprenticeships as part of a “Youth Pact” response to the crisis of youth unemployment to reduce the risk of a “Lost Generation” and rather build a “Generation of Hope”. Having agreed a set of G20 principles for quality apprenticeships, these could be scaled up through agreements at company and national levels.

## Key Elements of Quality Apprenticeships

### *Definition*

**5** Apprenticeships are a unique form of vocational education, comprising a combination of on-the-job and off-the-job-training, offering apprentices the opportunity not only to learn in a work-based environment but also to acquire skills in an academic setting. Apprenticeships must also be a stepping stone on pathways to satisfying and rewarding careers. They provide the foundations for further training and skills development and also facilitate the emergence and growth of new industries, based on technological and organisational innovations. Thus apprenticeship systems provide a source of skilled labour for an economy as a whole.

### *Governance*

**6** Despite differing institutional arrangements, apprenticeship systems that combine workplace-based as well as off-the-job training have proven to be a successful model of learning and skill formation. Quality apprenticeships are a shared responsibility between governments, employers and trade unions. Apprenticeship systems should have legal regulation and the active involvement of employers associations and trade unions in their overall governance. Trade unions are conscious of the unique role they must play. As indicated in the OECD Skills Strategy “trade unions can also help to shape education and training, help protect the interests of existing workers, ensure that those in work use their skills adequately, and see that investments in training are reflected in better-quality jobs and higher salaries”<sup>5</sup>

**7** “Skills Committees”, comprising representatives of governments, employers and trade unions, should be established in order to govern apprenticeship programmes and systems. Such committees should promote apprenticeships, ensure that the curriculum for specific occupational skills is not too narrowly defined, that remuneration is appropriate and that health and safety conditions are respected. These should operate at different levels of the economy. The German approach provides one model for this (see Box).

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3 G20 Leaders’ Declaration, Los Cabos, 18-19 June 2012 (paragraph 20).

4 G20 Leaders’ Declaration, Los Cabos, op cit (paragraph 24).

5 Better Skills, Better Jobs, Better Lives – A Strategic Approach to Skills Policies, OECD, 2012.

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## Box: The Apprenticeship System in Germany: The governance role of employers and trade unions (Social Partners)

National level	Participation of representatives of the trade unions and employers in the development of standards; Official recommendations relating to all fields of vocational education and training (VET)
Regional level	Federal states: Recommendations regarding the coordination between school and enterprise competent bodies: Counselling; monitoring / quality assurance; examinations; certificates
Sectoral level	Negotiations on the supply of apprenticeships; wage agreements covering apprenticeship pay
Company level	Planning and carrying out training in the enterprises

### *Ensuring Quality*

**8** There must be effective pathways for entry, assurance of high quality trainers and training provision of on-the-job and off-the-job mentoring, as well as opportunities for career development. There must be a focus on new technology, team work, problem solving, project management as well as critical thinking. Potential participants of quality apprenticeship programmes should have an opportunity to receive substantive services regarding guidance and counselling.

**9** In order to redress the sometimes negative perception of apprenticeships, as being inferior to other forms of post secondary and tertiary education, there should be a strategy for lifting the status of apprenticeships so that they are seen as a pathway towards a satisfying career. The employment relationship, as a fundamental element of an apprenticeship needs to be underpinned by a training contract, ensuring not only the provision of quality training but also employment stability during an economic downturn.

**10** Quality apprenticeships should focus on building bridges between the worlds of education, training and the world of work. The use of on-the-job-training is a key part of any quality apprenticeship programme. However, it must not used to tailor the training exclusively to the skills demands of an individual employer or a single firm. Quality apprenticeships need also to give particular attention to the acquisition of transferable skills.

**11** Quality apprenticeship programmes provide also an opportunity to strengthen the skills required for a transition towards a green economy. Until now, most training and skills programmes implemented have not adequately anticipated new skill requirements. Moreover, environmental and energy policies have failed to integrate workforce development and training in their implementation plans.

### *Remuneration and support*

**12** Workplace and industrial relations frameworks should complement and support vocational education and training. Moreover, the qualitative aspects of decent work for the young must not be compromised; compliance with core labour standards, appropriate remuneration, social security as well as occupational health and safety must be central elements of any qualitative apprenticeship programme.

**13** The provision of quality training and support is essential in order to achieve high completion rates. Available evidence suggests that many apprentices do not complete their training due to poor experience in the workplace, an inappropriate working and learning environment and a lack of support. Evidence also suggests that decent working and learning conditions and appropriate quality support for apprentices reflects positively on the whole experience and thus leads to higher rates of completion and retention.

**14** Apprentices must be given the status of an employee and thus have the same rights as regular employees. The remuneration of apprenticeships should be regulated and negotiated with decent wages being paid subject to adjustments for periods of education.

### *Length*

**15** An apprenticeship programme offering work-based training should comprise employment for at least 30 hours per week and last not less than 12 months in order to allow for the acquisition of meaningful and certified qualifications. Programmes must provide broad-based course modules so as not to encourage the production of a narrowly specialised and only partly trained youth cohort. Pilot programmes should be developed to facilitate the recruitment and exchange of apprentices between different countries.

### *Firm involvement*

**16** Apprenticeship programmes need to address the negative views about hiring young people held by some employers, often questioning their preparedness for work, their basic skills and their attitudes. Moreover, they need to address the fact that employers place an increasing emphasis on previous experience and thus tend to exclude in particular young recruits. Thus, programmes must convey the message that apprenticeships are an institutional means of reducing the training costs for employers and aim to strengthen the commitment of firms regarding the supply of apprenticeship opportunities.

### *Financing*

**17** Quality apprenticeship programmes should be jointly funded by governments and employers. An employer contribution scheme should be implemented, requiring employers to pay a contribution. All employers providing training for their workforce or employing apprentices would have access to and benefit from the support services and benefits available. Payments by the government into the scheme would match the employer contributions. Schemes should be managed by skills councils at the appropriate level. It can be operated in a way that those employers who provide training which meets high quality standards would have their contributions returned either in part or in full. In order to increase the number of apprenticeships offered by firms, financial incentives should be conditional on observing quality standards. Evidence from a number of countries suggests that financial incentives directly paid to employers have only a limited effect on their decision to recruit apprentices. That applies in particular to broadly designed one-size-fits-all types of incentives. In order to avoid deadweight and to deliver value for money, financial incentives and government investment in training need to be effectively targeted.

**18** Although some employers provide effective and high quality training, not all employers do comply with high quality standards. The current rate and pattern of investment in training provided by many employers is inadequate; it is not sufficient

to avoid and address skill shortages. Therefore, governments providing qualitative apprenticeships should ensure that firms prior to applying for financial assistance in order to offer new or additional apprenticeships participate in an accreditation scheme approving that they are able to meet the requirements for the provision of high quality training. In this respect employers should prove that apprenticeships have been made an essential part of their long-term strategy on workforce and skills development; apprenticeships need to be embedded in a workforce planning approach.

### ***Equity and gender balance***

**19** Apprenticeship programmes must also support equity objectives. They should also facilitate vocational education and training of young males and females in non-traditional gender occupations. There must therefore be an expansion of the apprenticeship model to female dominated sectors and occupations. Quality apprenticeships also have to address race equality and ensure that there is a more balanced representation of young workers from minority groups in apprenticeship schemes.

## **Conclusion – a road map for the G20**

**20** The L20 hopes that there can be a rapid agreement of principles of quality apprenticeships with the B20. There should then be national dialogue encouraged by governments to scale up the provision of apprenticeships at company level. National dialogue should set targets and there should then be reporting back to the G20 Task Force and assessment at the next Labour Ministers' Meeting in 2013.

**21** Beyond the issue of quality apprenticeships the Task Force should step up its activities in the face of what risks becoming a worsening employment situation in many OECD countries in 2013. Commitments entered into at past Employment and Labour Ministers' Meetings should be monitored on a recurring basis. The Task Force should prepare a joint report, with the G20 Development Working Group, on the action being taken to implement past recommendations on social protection. This should be an input to the G20's Los Cabos Accountability Assessment Framework.

**22** In addition to quality apprenticeships, the L20 and B20 at Los Cabos urged for action to be taken to step up public infrastructure investment. The Task Force should develop best practice in ensuring that infrastructure has the maximum sustainable employment impact. The L20 and B20 also stated that action to reduce employment informality and precarity should be a priority. The Task Force should develop its work in the line of the Pittsburgh G20 Summit commitment to put "quality jobs at the heart of the recovery" that should incorporate action to reduce informality.

**23** The Task Force should also prepare joint work on employment with the G20 Finance Ministers in the line of including more directly employment as an indicator in the framework for strong, sustainable and balanced growth.

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