



## Learning for Jobs: Workplace Learning Pointers for policy development

### WORKPLACE LEARNING IS A POWERFUL TOOL IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING

- Workplace learning includes a diverse set of practices, including:
  - Job shadowing in which students “shadow” a worker to learn about their job
  - service learning voluntary work by students, typically in non-profit organisations
  - internships in which students work for a firm for zero or nominal wages
  - apprenticeships which provide more structured long-term workplace learning, typically over a period of years, leading to a qualification
- Workplaces provide a strong learning environment because they offer real on-the-job experience that makes it easier to acquire both hard and soft skills.
  - Hard skills may require practical training on expensive equipment. Up-to-date equipment is already available in firms, along with people who know how to use it and can explain associated techniques.
  - Soft skills – like problem solving, conflict management and entrepreneurship – are more effectively learnt in workplaces than in classrooms and simulated work environments.
- Workplace learning facilitates a two-way flow of information between potential employers and employees about each other, making later recruitment much more effective and less costly and usefully complementing career guidance.
- Employer willingness to offer workplace training provides a signal and verification that a VET programme is relevant and has labour market value. When workplace learning is a VET programme requirement, it can help to keep student places aligned with likely future employment demand.
- Trainees in the workplace can make a productive contribution to the output of the firm and to the economy as a whole, if the workplace learning environment is structured to facilitate this.

### BALANCE WORKPLACE LEARNING WITH OTHER TRAINING SETTINGS

- Combine workplace training with other training components. Theory components often best learned in a classroom setting and some practical skills can be more effectively learnt off the job:
  - where equipment is expensive or dangerous, simulated work environments may be more cost-effective
  - off-the-job training can operate at a slower pace and provide students with time to initiate their skills
  - economies of scale may favour teaching some basic practical skills collectively in training workshops
- Use off-the-job training to minimise potential gaps in skills arising because of variations across local employers who may not provide the same workplace learning opportunities.
- Adapt the timing of workplace and classroom components to best suit each occupation. Some require substantial theoretical and practical training before workplace learning while for others, parallel classroom and workplace learning is more appropriate.

### ENSURE QUALITY IN WORKPLACE LEARNING

- Ensure that apprentices, employers and VET institutions share a common understanding of the training, as well as clearly defined roles and responsibilities.

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- Ensure workplace trainers are well-prepared and can respond to the strong demands and expectations for training provided on the job.
- Provide a good range of vocational skills through workplace learning, including both hard and soft workplace skills, and offer an effective route into the relevant job.
- Require apprentices and trainees to perform a variety of tasks that increase in complexity over time and allow trainees to work autonomously and practice their skills. This can take place either within a single firm or by rotation across firms.
- Exercise careful quality control in apprenticeships and traineeships to ensure that the employers involved deliver on their training responsibilities.
- Provide a clear contractual framework for apprenticeships and an appropriate legal framework to underpin other forms of workplace learning.

## DEVELOP APPROPRIATE INCENTIVES FOR EMPLOYERS AND TRAINEES

- Ensure that employers know that they can expect to obtain net benefits from providing workplace training places. Studies on the full spectrum of costs and benefits can encourage employers to take trainees and apprentices, by demonstrating the real economic returns to them.
- Provide government incentives for workplace training within VET programmes in line with the spillover benefits to other employers and to society at large. But incentives should be carefully designed to avoid two potential weaknesses, namely:
  - subsidising places that would have been offered without the subsidy (so-called deadweight losses)
  - encouraging firms to reduce other types of training that are less generously subsidised (so-called substitution effects)
- Sustain incentives for employers during an economic downturn, where economic pressures would otherwise limit the active participation of employers. Measures to cushion apprenticeships and other forms of workplace training from severe economic downturn could include:
  - Careful use of temporary subsidies for apprentice starts
  - Creation of more apprenticeship places in the public sector
  - Some means of sharing risks between different employers for taking on an apprentice
  - More practical training in VET institutions to compensate for the loss of workplace training
  - Postponing shift from general education to occupation-specific training in education and training systems
- Ensure that the benefits of workplace training remain attractive to potential apprentices, relative to the alternatives of an academic track in tertiary education, or direct entry into the labour market.

## FURTHER READING

The OECD's policy review of vocational education and training (VET), *Learning for Jobs*, comprises a programme of analytical work and individual country reviews and is designed to help countries make their VET systems more responsive to labour market needs.

Further information about the policy review and reports on VET systems in other countries is available on the OECD website [www.oecd.org/edu/learningforjobs](http://www.oecd.org/edu/learningforjobs).