**An enhanced role for apprenticeship in a changing world of work**

**The external factors that have an impact on apprenticeship and the relevant design and delivery responses were discussed at a joint Cedefop/OECD symposium, on 7 October in Paris.**

New work carried out by international researchers was presented to over 100 participants representing ministries, social partners and national apprenticeship institutions from around the world.

Apprenticeship has a long history of enabling young people’s transition from education to sustained skilled employment. When employers are fully engaged, apprenticeship aligns the formative education and training of learners to actual labour market needs.

In recent years, governments across Europe and the OECD have invested considerable resources in improving apprenticeship provision, introducing and reforming apprenticeship to reach even more learners, both young people and, increasingly, adults.

**Looking ahead**

The symposium looked at the future of apprenticeship from the perspective of new approaches to education and training and external megatrends – such as socio-demographic changes, digitalisation, automation and other new technologies, new forms of work organisation, ageing populations.

Cedefop Executive Director Jürgen Siebel and OECD’s Director of Employment, Labour and Social Affairs, Stefano Scarpetta welcomed the participants.

Mr Siebel said: ‘It is really time to think about where apprenticeship is headed. Accelerating labour market change, new forms of work and learning, and changing partnership and cooperation models require fundamental reflection on how to best shape the apprenticeships of the future. I trust the joint Cedefop/OECD symposium will give us food for thought and help us find the ways Cedefop can best support policy-makers in their efforts to build the apprenticeship of tomorrow.’

Mr Scarpetta noted: ‘Digitalisation, ageing and globalisation are creating many new opportunities but also new challenges to our education and training systems. Over the next 10 to 15 years, one in seven jobs may be fully automated and another third may be overhauled across the OECD. Good quality apprenticeships, which prepare learners with the skills that employers highly value, must play a central role in the package of effective skills policies.’

Cedefop Head of Department for Learning and Employability Antonio Ranieri highlighted that ‘in recent years, in Europe, many policy goals have been associated with apprenticeships: too many purposes for one policy instrument, actually.’ Different policy designs and governance arrangements were associated with the same popular name, leading to different outcomes. ‘Apprenticeships’ might still be a good answer to current and future challenges of the world of work and society as a whole. But this should not be taken for granted, said Mr Ranieri.

In the morning session, possible scenarios for apprenticeships were presented and discussed. According to Philipp Grollmann and Jörg Markowitsch much will depend on the broader VET developments and the relative function assigned to apprenticeship. There is a risk that besides ‘ideal apprenticeships’, associated to educational goals, tripartite governance, and long-term commitment for human capital development, we continue to have ‘fake’ ones, which firms use as screening tools to recruit low-cost labour force, with little educational value, low attractiveness and visibility, and high levels of individualisation and fragmentation.

On the other hand, apprenticeships could provide the high-level and specialised skills increasingly required by the labour market if organised at higher education level. More than one presentation addressed this issue. While there are success cases, such as the Scottish one presented by Stewart McKinlay, there is also a risk of overlap with traditional higher education, as Dieter Euler pointed out. In this context, various future scenarios are, again, possible. What is important is that apprenticeship developments be driven by demand.

**Country examples**

The impact of external trends on apprenticeships was addressed in the afternoon session. Digitalisation has had some impact in the majority of the German firms surveyed in Regina Flake’s study, but only a minority introduced intensive and strategic changes. Both companies with a leading digital position and those with little digital experience will need to address the impact of digitalisation. To do so, as the Swiss telecommunication industry described by Antje Barabasch illustrated, a ‘learning culture’ in innovative organisations could be key.

Presentations from countries with a traditional apprenticeship offered examples of excellence and success in their national context (Austria, Denmark, Germany, Switzerland). Voices from the Anglo-Saxon world (Australia and England) suggested that apprenticeship has already been changing to address existing challenges in a changing world of work, and initiative has often come from employers and apprentices themselves.

A high-level panel concluded the event, with interventions from the European Commission, ETF, ILO, UNESCO, OECD and Cedefop. All speakers acknowledged the importance apprenticeship continues to have in the countries, its potential for further growth and its value for companies and learners. Cedefop expert Ramona David warned that such value, though, is not yet visible because evidence about it and the quality of the learning experiences and their comparability are not always available.

OECD senior analyst Anthony Mann stressed the importance of continuing the work on apprenticeship cost-benefit analysis, and the Commission’s Norbert Schoebel said that apprenticeships will continue to be a priority of the EU policy agenda.

You can find the new research presented at the symposium [**here**](https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/events/2019-joint-cedefop-and-oecd-symposium-next-steps-apprenticeship-0). A summary publication will be published by the OECD shortly after the symposium and the full papers will be published by Cedefop in 2020.

The symposium was followed, on 8 October, by a meeting of Cedefop's community of apprenticeship experts.