Online Discussion Summary

International
Labour
Organization

Apprenticeships – What works and why? Summary of a joint Australia–ILO Online Discussion
25 June to 6 July 2012

Moderators:
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Akiko Sakamoto, ILO Skills and Employability Specialist
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Abbreviations

APGreenJobs	Asia-Pacific Green Jobs Network
AP-IRNet	Asia-Pacific Industrial Relations Network
APMagNet	Asia-Pacific Migration Network
APYouthNet	Asia-Pacific Youth Employment Network
CBT	competency based training
CoP	community of practice
COTVET	Council for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (Ghana)
DSD	Department of Skills Development (Thailand)
GTC	Group Training Company
ILO	International Labour Organization
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
MPC	Master Crafts Person
NGO	non-governmental organization
NQF	national qualifications framework
OSH	occupational safety and health
OTOP	One Tambon One Product Project
RPL	recognition of prior learning
SME	small- and medium sized enterprise
TESDA	Philippines Technical Education Skills Development Authority
TVET	technical and vocational education and training
UN	United Nations

1. Introduction

In 2007, as a response to the ILO's constituents' request for better sharing of knowledge, the International Labour Organization (ILO) Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific initiated the development of communities of practice (CoPs). Five years on, the ILO has established five regional CoPs[1] on the following thematic areas: Skills and Employability, Migration, Green Jobs, Industrial Relations and Youth Employment. The CoPs are interactive networks where committed professionals share experiences, information, news and resources. The CoPs organize regular online discussions in which professionals and practitioners share their ideas and experiences on various issues related to decent work in Asia and the Pacific.

One of the pressing issues in the Asia-Pacific region (and globally) is the lack of decent work opportunities for young women and men. Youth unemployment and underemployment often goes hand in hand with a lack of access to education and skills development opportunities. Many of the region's young people are trapped in a vicious circle of low skills, low productivity and low income opportunities.

One of the ways in which the ILO aims to improve the skills and employability levels in the region is through assisting its constituents in developing and expanding apprenticeship systems which prepare young women and men for decent and productive work. However, apprenticeship systems vary from country to country and are deeply rooted in a society's cultural, institutional and economic context. Apprenticeships can be formal or informal, paid or unpaid, school-based and/or workshop-based and can last from weeks to years. In order to get a better idea of the different apprenticeship systems in our region and to understand their potential for creating decent work opportunities for youth, the Australian Government and the ILO's Asia-Pacific Skills and Employability and Youth Employment Networks have organized a series of discussions on this topic.

The first part of the joint Australia–ILO discussion series consisted of a podcast[2] discussion among Ms Marie Persson from the Skills Australia Board Member; Ms Carmela Torres, ILO Senior Skills and Employability Specialist; and Mr Matthieu Cognac, ILO Youth Employment Specialist. The experts discussed the issue of youth employment and apprenticeships with apprentices from Australia and Germany, a policy maker from Indonesia and a young trade unionist from Pakistan (you can find a summary of this podcast in Annex III).

The second part of the discussion series on apprenticeships presents the online discussion held from 25 June to 6 July 2012 as summarized in this paper. The discussion was jointly moderated by Ms Marie Persson, Ms Akiko Sakamoto (ILO Skills and Employability Specialist), Mr Paul Comyn (ILO Senior Vocational Skills and Development Specialist) and Mr Matthieu Cognac.

The discussion received around 90 contributions (see list of participants in Annex II) from professionals and practitioners from various countries and regions including Fiji, Philippines, Australia, India, Bangladesh, Papua New Guinea, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Thailand, and Ghana. The participants came from a number of different institutional backgrounds, such as, governments, workers and employers organizations, international organizations, research institutes and non-governmental organizations

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[1] The five ILO-sponsored regional communities of practice are: the Asia-Pacific Youth Employment Network, APYouthNet (www.apyouthnet.ilo.org); the Asia-Pacific Green Jobs Network, APGreenJobs (www.apgreenjobs.ilo.org); the Asia-Pacific Migration Network, APMagNet (www.apmagnet.ilo.org); the Asia-Pacific Skills and Employability Network (www.apskills.ilo.org); and the Asia-Pacific Industrial Relations Network, AP-IRNet (www.apirnet.ilo.org).

[2] The podcast "Apprenticeship systems in Asia-Pacific" can be listened to here: at: http://tinyurl.com/talkshow7

(NGOs). The diversity of the participants' geographic and professional backgrounds has made this discussion particularly lively and insightful.

The moderators would like to thank all participants for sharing their experiences and expertise throughout the discussion series and for working together towards decent work for youth.

2. Discussion Summary

The discussion sought to address the following three questions:

1) *What are the key characteristics of a successful apprenticeship system?*
2) *What safeguards to protect the rights and welfare of young people in apprenticeships?*
3) *How can we strengthen informal/traditional apprenticeships to be more structured and regulated (so that apprentices' rights are better protected)?*

2.1 What are the key characteristics of a successful apprenticeship system?

There was broad consensus that one of the key characteristics for a successful apprenticeship system was that apprentices should be enrolled in off-the-job training in the technical and vocational education and training (TVET) system as well as on-the-job training at the workplace. It was recommended that the workplace based learning must provide access to working in the full range of functions appropriate to the occupation (which in the case of national qualifications meant the full complement of units of competency required for the national qualification). It was stressed that a successful apprenticeship system needed a qualification pathway that was relevant to the industry and that enabled progression in line with the individual's ability/skills. A participant from India recommended that successful apprenticeship systems should motivate people in the three key characteristics of learning, the so-called "3 Ms", consisted of: manufacturing, maintenance and marketing. Further, successful models of apprenticeships recognised existing skill levels and were delivered by industry-relevant and current practitioners.

The participants emphasized that workplace learning should to be structured and school-based learning should combine underpinning knowledge and manual skills that were unlikely to be provided in the workplace – or which are more effectively learnt in an off-the-job setting (could be the case for computer use e.g.). The difficulty was achieving real complementarity as it involved substantial flexibility not always found in TVET institutions. Papua New Guinea (PNG) was mentioned as a negative example where the training at a TVET college was so inadequate that the industry had set up their own off-the-job training component.

Another aspect of the discussion concerned the role of the government in apprenticeship systems. Many participants agreed that the structure should not be too complex and too bureaucratic. In this context, a participant from Malaysia mentioned that Malaysia's National Dual Training System was driven primarily by the government instead of the private sector. The participant found the system overly structured and inflexible and suggested that this might be the reason why the number of apprentices (5,000 year) in Malaysia was relatively small. The participant emphasized that apprenticeship systems must be flexible enough to respond to technological changes and should be driven by the private sector rather than governments. It was added that systems overly controlled by governments risked jeopardizing the very essential of apprenticeship: that enterprises were actively contributing to the learning process –

because it was in their own interest. Using a broker such as an industry association was recommended as a very good way to assist in growing the number of apprentices and giving employers the right incentives. More generally, building trust and partnerships between the different actors, including unions, was therefore absolutely fundamental.

On the issue of trade unions, a representative from the Federation of Free Workers (Philippines) pointed out that trade unions had a role to play not only in apprenticeship programmes but in the TVET system at large. The participant mentioned a training programme for call centre agents which had been organized by the Federation of Free Workers and where the organization made use of training vouchers supplied by the Philippines Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA). The 100-hour course was said to have achieved a graduation rate of more than 95 per cent and resulted in a placement rate of about 65 per cent. Some of the courses' participants were already employed in the industry and could make use of the certification for career advancement purposes. Trade union participants have highlighted that not enough attention was given to the legal environment, especially as it related to rights covered by the ILO Core Conventions 87 and 98, rights to the freedom of association and collective bargaining, respectively. It was suggested that union involvement could be maximized by involving unions in monitoring and inspecting apprenticeship programmes so that they conformed not only to the law but to qualifications and competency standards. This could also work as corrective actions in the areas of occupational safety and health (OSH) and trade unionists could function as "peer mentors" or trainers. The member from the Skills Australia Board recommended a related study: "A shared Responsibility: Apprenticeships for the 2st Century" which found that trade unions were very much part of the "sharing"[3].

Special reference was made to apprenticeship systems in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). It was commented that Australia had introduced Group Training Companies (GTCs)[4] to help SMEs in remote and rural areas. These GTCs acted as a company which employed a group of apprentices and placed and rotated them through a number of enterprises. These GTCs also organized off-the-job training and functioned as a broker handling any problems. In addition if one company experienced financial difficulties or defaulted, the GTCs could put the rotation with this enterprise on hold and the apprentice would still be employed and receive training with one of the other employers in the GTC. It was added that in Sri Lanka[5], to achieve the same end, the apprentices were moved around by the apprenticeship authorities to gain the necessary experience.

The discussion quickly moved to another key question: how to involve employers and how to share the costs of apprenticeship systems. It was pointed out that employers were concerned that the expense incurred in training a person was gained by another employer and/or the person being trained (i.e. the risk of poaching). This in turn led to discussing the role of governments in providing financial incentives to employers so that they could collectively train 'for the nation'. It was recommended that governments needed to adequately fund employers for their training efforts which may not directly benefit the employer who is providing the training. It was suggested to look at it as placing a cost on the training effort that would be required in a training institution to achieve the desired outcomes. This of course would be substantial to achieve every unit of competency. Some participants suggested that there should be financial incentives for employers but that the critical question was how to achieve the right balance. A participant from Thailand provided some insight on how Thai employers received incentives for hiring

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[3] http://www.australianapprenticeships.gov.au/faq/documents/apprenticeshipsforthe21stcenturyexpertpanel.pdf
[4] http://www.grouptraining.com.au/ An analysis of the Group Training Company Apprenticeship System can be found in the report "Looking Ahead" (http://www.grouptraining.com.au/Publications/LookingAheadReport)
[5] For more information: Sri Lankan National Apprenticeship and Industry Training Authority (NAITA) http://www.naita.slt.lk/.

apprentices. In 2002, the Department of Skill Development (DSD)[6] under the Thai Ministry of Labour issued the *Skill Development Promotion Act* which offered companies a 200 per cent tax reduction of the cost of provided training. This Act did not only include formal apprentices but also learners in the informal economy. The Higher Education Commission Authority of Thailand also extended this Act to university students who could undertake 3-month traineeships as part of their university course. In rural areas this training scheme worked by cooperating with local communities and by integrating other line ministries (e.g., agriculture, energy). A good example of this was the One Tambon One Product (OTOP)[7] programme where local communities decided on a local business model based on their region's competitive advantage and the public authorities provided the necessary training, facilities and support to formalize the businesses.

The participant from Skills Australia emphasized that businesses were key to increasing apprenticeships but that some regulations and structures must be put in place to ensure that apprentices gained transportable and transferrable skills. The participant explained that governments played an important role in ensuring quality and broad skills. Similarly, it was suggested that unions could play a role in helping ensure that skills were broad and portable, and not only enterprise-specific.

It was pointed out that studies from Australia showed that broad financial incentives to employers had only a marginal effect on employers' decisions to hire apprentices[8]. In response, it was said that while it was understandable that research might show incentives in Australia had been marginal, there was nonetheless a need to clearly make more employers aware of the advantages to them if they take on apprentices. Since productivity was what employers were after, if the income from having an apprentice was in excess of the costs then there would be an advantage. This could come about through either direct government grants and/or a training fund (with funds levied from all employers). Low apprenticeship wages had been part of this equation but if they were raised (as they should to get higher completion rates) then the advantages of apprenticeships had to be upheld in some way. In this context, it was said that it would also be an incentive for apprentices to stay if the wage of skilled workers who had completed an apprenticeship was considerably higher than the apprenticeship wage.

It was suggested to establish an industry-wide apprenticeship system with the same/similar conditions leading to a skill level/ qualification that was recognized by all (including agreed wage levels if possible) and that ensured employability across the industry. It was added that social dialogue played a crucial role in bringing about these industry-wide wage agreements for skilled workers and apprentices.

It was stressed that countries like Australia and Germany had well-established training cultures which was not the case in many countries in the Asia-Pacific region. Therefore, there had to be some system of incentives to drive a training culture.

Some discussants have added to the discussion comments about general trends and challenges of apprenticeship systems in their own countries. For instance, a participant from the Fiji Higher Education Commission, for instance, explained that the current apprenticeship scheme in Fiji had been struggling to meet the targeted numbers required by the Government. The Fiji Ministry of Labour was currently looking into revamping the all skills training schemes including apprenticeship programmes. The participant hoped that the revised scheme would move from the current traditional time based scheme to

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[6] http://www.dsd.go.th/
[7] http://www.thai-otop-city.com/
[8] National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) (2011) Report Two: Overview of the Australian apprenticeship and traineeship system 2010

a CBT mode. There were currently consultations with all key stakeholders underway to jointly determine the future of Fiji's apprenticeship system.

Finally, the issue of gender equality was raised as a critical issue for successful apprenticeship systems. Unequal gender relations in many countries in our region had led to structural underinvestment in girls' education and skills training. It was claimed that technical and vocational education was still very much a 'male world' and the percentage of female students enrolled in technical/vocational programmes was significantly lower than for their male counterparts in most countries in the Asia-Pacific region[9]. The "Girls in Trades" programmes in Australia were mentioned as a good practice for addressing gender imbalances in TVET. The participant from Skills Australia shared her experience that it was not optimal to put just one or two girls in a trade group but that having three or more girls and the opportunity to have mentoring has shown to be successful.

2.2 What safeguards to protect the rights of young people in apprenticeships?

Some participants raised concerns over the potential exploitation of apprentices and that there was a real risk of creating a supply of cheap labour if apprenticeships were not properly embedded and monitored in a learning system. It was stated that it was absolutely crucial for a formal apprenticeship system to introduce an apprenticeship relationship to the legal framework in the country. It was pointed out that an apprentice was not a formal and thus rights and obligations could and should differ from normal employment contracts. This could relate to exemptions from minimum wage clauses since it was the nature of apprenticeships that learners started at very low productivity levels. In this context, it was mentioned that there were cases in the Philippines where employers made use of the six-month apprenticeship system since the legal wage for apprentices was 75 per cent of the prevailing minimum wage. It was further argued that in the absence of strong trade unions, the apprenticeship programmes were not regularly monitored. Similarly, less formal on-the-job trainings were claimed to be used to replace the regular workforce and supress wages.

It was argued that labour inspectors should be aware of the contractual arrangements and be in a position to identify the nature of the employment relationship. The Participants also identified a need to ensure that legislation and regulations were modern and up to date, and balanced the needs of workers and employers in terms of flexibility and security. In addition, a Code of Conduct for those employing apprentices was suggested as a potential means to prevent abuse and exploitation of apprentices. The concept of 'master apprentice' was brought in as a useful safeguard for apprentices. This is the notion of a person in the workplace who acts as a formal advisor and checks the quality of the skills being taught on the job. It was further suggested to introduce basic orientation trainings for apprentices in which they could learn about their basic rights at work. It was also suggested to provide new apprentices with a manual or contract which included all necessary information about apprenticeships and the rights of apprentices.

Moreover, it was noted that apprentices in informal settings were often not fully aware of their rights and obligations and that mechanisms to enforce rights were either weak or non-existent. To address this issue, it was suggested to advocate for a strengthening of the mostly oral apprenticeship agreement/contract by introducing written contracts or by including a trusted third party when concluding the contract, for instance, a member of the business association or a community group.

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[9] According to a study undertaken by the UN Girls' Education Initiative:
http://www.apyouthnet.ilo.org/resources/making-education-work-the-gender-dimension-of-the-school-to-work-transition-2009/at_download/file1

In this context a participant from Ghana mentioned the importance of parental concern for the apprentices. The parents/guidance signed off on a kind of memorandum of understanding (MoU) which entailed an agreement on the role of the trade association, the role of the MPC (trainer) and the apprentice (trainee).

On the other hand, some participants raised concerns that if laws and regulations were too bureaucratic employers could be discouraged from taking on apprentices. A participant from India shared this concern and stated that one of the problems with apprenticeship trainings in India was the tightness of government controls which sometimes discouraged employers to recruit apprentices under the government apprenticeship programme. The participant said it was important to strike the right balance between government regulations and motivating employers to recruit apprentices. As a positive example, the participant cited a training programme that took part under the Indian Periya Maniammai University (PMU) Centre for University Industry Interaction (CMII)[10] where apprentices received appropriate documentation, safety trainings and had access to industrial coordinators/ mentors who assessed training progress and provided counselling (financed by industries/ industry associations).

2.3 How can a government-regulated formal apprenticeship system be used to support skills development in the informal economy?

It was noted that, while often unstructured and poorly regulated, so-called 'informal apprenticeships' or 'traditional apprenticeships' were a main means to acquiring skills in many developing countries. The challenges in terms of appropriate transfer or acquisition of skills and protecting the welfare of apprentices were far greater than in formal settings.

A contributor from the Ghanaian Council for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (COTVET) raised the general question whether there was actually a need to 'formalize the informal'. The participant explained that in a country like Ghana, where about 80 per cent of all basic skills were acquired in the informal sector, traditional or informal apprenticeships had been going on for a long time and were self-sustaining, self-financing and self-regulating. The sectors had their own trade associations, their own constitutions and had designed their own competency based training modules. The assessment and certification were carried out by the association with internal and external assessment. The problem was the certificate issued by these associations could not be used to move on to another level of the educational ladder. There was no policy on recognition of prior learning (RPL) in line with the TVET qualifications framework. There was also no clear distinction between a master craftsperson who previously trained apprentices and those who did not. Despite these and other shortcomings, the participant believed it was better to address these shortcomings rather than formalizing the sector and adding more burdens to the already overburdened government support to the formal TVET delivery. Other participants agreed with the idea of strengthening informal apprenticeships rather than seeking their formalization. The issue of RPL was considered still important though. A participant from the Philippines said that in a NQF instant assessment and competency/qualification certification were possible and that the Philippines had a system of equivalencies in both primary and higher education which allowed trainees/ school drop-outs to take equivalency assessment in order to gain certificates or diplomas.

Papua New Guinea was brought up by a participant as an example where there was an attempt to link the informal and formal sector through national skills standards and skills testing. According to the participant, however, the kitchen skills needed in a small guesthouse were based around domestic

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[10] http://www.pmu.edu/web/cuii.html

appliances and equipment whereas competency standards for a commercial chef were likely to be specific to commercial facilities and equipment.

Two officers from the ILO TVET Reform Project in Bangladesh[11] shared some experiences on informal apprenticeships in Bangladesh. The informal apprenticeship model piloted in Bangladesh as part of the project consisted of: i) introducing a Competency Skills Log Book which would act as a structured learning tool guide for the Master Crafts Persons (MPCs) and apprentices; ii) a Code of Practice which contained main agreements of the rights and responsibilities; iii) Five days of apprenticeships supplemented by a one day institutional training per week; iv) registration of the apprentices with the government authorities to enable apprentices to receive a completion certificate; v) assessment of skills through direct assessment of competencies to obtain a certificate under the NQF (which was in the process of being introduced in Bangladesh); vi) monitoring the work places and apprenticeship system by an civil society organization; and vii) assessment and certification of the technical skills of the MCPs through RPL processes (which was in the process of being introduced in Bangladesh).

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4. Annex

Annex I Background note to the discussion

Online Discussion Forum on

"Apprenticeship in Asia and the Pacific"

Background Note

Young people strive for decent employment and better income opportunities, as well as for the chance to participate in, and benefit from, economic and social development. Yet, many economies remain characterized by high levels of un- and underemployment of youth: substantial shares of young people are trapped in a vicious circle of low skills, low productivity and low income opportunities.

Today, smooth transitions from school to productive and decent work in the formal economy are the realistic expectations of a small share of young people: those with the opportunity for good basic education that opens pathways to further learning and to employment. Even for these young people, expectations often go unmet because low rates of job-rich growth in the formal economy result in scarce employment opportunities. Most young people however do not have the chance to attend formal institutions of learning.

Apprenticeship (formal and informal) is a widely used term. Some consider it as a mode of learning where skills are acquired at the workplace in a structured manner. Others think of an apprenticeship as having a dual character, combining institution and enterprise based learning i.e.: a combination of on and off the job training. An apprenticeship is often mistaken for training modes or concepts that appear similar but for the purpose of this discussion, what differentiates an apprenticeship from other approaches is reflected in the following 5 defining elements:

1) The master craftsperson/employer and the apprentice conclude an agreement (a training contract);
2) The apprentice works to achieve specific occupational competencies required for a trade (the training content);
3) Training is mainly workplace-based and integrated into the production process wherever possible; the training process);
4) The apprentice is typically a young person;
5) The costs of an apprenticeship are primarily shared between the master craftsperson/employer and the apprentice.

The ILO has been working with constituents to upgrade and expand apprenticeship systems as they are seen as a cost-effective way for countries to make wide-scale gains in enhancing their skills base. A combination of approaches and interventions may be required to improve the quality of training, the level of skills acquired, working conditions, entrepreneurship and employability of apprentices across the board with attention also required for improving the access of young women to non-traditional occupations.

This online discussion for both the Skills and Employability Community of Practice and APYouthnet will deal with the issue of apprenticeships and consider such approaches as efforts to expand and complement existing initiatives to improve national skills development systems and in doing so, boost young people's employability, income opportunities and access to decent work.

Annex II List of participants

List of online discussion participants

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Nice Coronacion, Alliance of Progessive Labour (ALP) Philippines
Paul Brady
Sheela Daskara
Sue Freeman
Susanita Tesiorna
Tony Asper, FFW, Philippines
ILO (John Ritchotte, Matthieu Cognac, Paul Comyn, Nelien Haspels, Akiko Sakamoto, Srinivas Reddy, Christine Hofmann, Patrick Daru, Steffi Jochim)

Annex III APYouthNet Talkshow Summary: Apprenticeships in Asia-Pacific

APYouthNet

Talkshow Summary: *Apprenticeships in Asia-Pacific*
(June 2012, Bangkok)

Moderator: Ms Sophy Fisher (ILO Senior Communication and Public Information Officer)
Participants: Ms Marie Persson (Skills Australia); Ms Carmela Torres (ILO Senior Skills and Employability Specialist) and Mr Matthieu Cognac (ILO Youth Employment Specialist).

Callers: Mr Jaimes Alick (Australian welding apprentice); Mr Patrick Stadler (German electronics apprentice)

Camera, sound and editing: Mr Julian Hadden
Producer: Ms Steffi Jochim

This podcast is a co-production between the ILO's Asia-Pacific Youth Employment (www.apyouthnet.ilo.org) and Skills and Employability Networks (www.apskills.ilo.org)

From left to right: Sophy Fisher, Matthieu Cognac, Carmela Torres © ILO

Question 1: What is an apprenticeship and how can apprenticeship systems prepare young people for the world of work?

The first part of the discussion dealt with different concepts of apprenticeships and how these were linked to youth employment. Ms Torres explained that apprenticeships came in many forms and shapes but that they were essentially a practical and theoretical work-based kind of training which led to employable, recognized and mobile skills. Further, apprenticeships introduced young people to the world of work and improved their soft skills and attitudes towards work.

Mr Cognac stated that concepts of apprenticeship programmes varied from country to country. Some looked at it more in terms of training programmes, while others regarded apprenticeships primarily as a form of work experience.   He further said that apprenticeships were often associated with traditional 'blue collar jobs' although there were now many apprenticeship systems in new industries such as those related to information and communications technologies (ICT). Moreover, apprenticeship programmes in Asia-Pacific existed in the public sector, for instance, the well-established government internship programmes in the Philippines and Pakistan. In more general terms, Mr Cognac stressed the importance of all kind of apprenticeships since they provided young job seekers with the right skills and attitudes to enter the job market. This was especially the case during the current times of economic crisis where young people were the 'last in and first out' and needed relevant skills and experience to compete with more experiences workers.

Question 2: What do apprenticeships look like in Australia?

Ms Persson explained that apprenticeships and traineeships were offered across all industries in Australia. The key characteristic of the Australian apprenticeship system was that it existed within employment relations. Ms Persson further elaborated that apprenticeships were changing from traditional occupations towards older aged apprentices (the average age was currently 24) in increasingly high-tech industries such as ICT, finance, hospitality, tourism, community services and age care. One of the challenges of modern apprenticeships was that many did no longer operate on a master–apprentice relationship basis and that some apprentices were discouraged by the lack of mentoring at the workplace. Ms Persson stressed that successful apprenticeships were based on a partnership between the training provider, the employer, the industry and the employees. An additional challenge was constituted by the low completion rate of apprenticeships which currently stood at 48 per cent. Many of the drop-out apprentices left their apprenticeships early because of higher wages available to them, particularly in jobs related to Australia's ongoing resource boom.

Ms Torres added that sometimes the length of apprenticeships was an impediment to higher completion rates. Employers might have to rethink whether some skills could be taught in a shorter timeframe. Ms Torres explained that there were significant differences in the duration of apprenticeship programmes among countries in the region.

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The Philippines, for instance, offered apprenticeship programmes of three to six months while in Fiji (formal and informal) apprenticeships could last from one to four years.

An example of an Australian apprenticeship programme was given by Mr Alick, a former boiler making apprentice from Australia, who called in to talk about his apprenticeship experience. Mr Alick said that his apprenticeship with a Queensland based apprenticeship company lasted for around three and a half years of which 18 months were workshop based. His apprenticeship included a theoretical component taught in one to four week blocks at a Technical and Further Education (TAFE) college. Mr Alick said that after completing his apprenticeship he found it easy to get a well-paying job that matched his newly acquired qualification and that he pursued further certification as an international welding specialist.

Ms Persson then elaborated on the TAFE college. TAFEs played a vital role in the Australian technical and vocational education and training (TVET) system. The mostly government-funded colleges were particularly important for regional Australia as they guaranteed the ability to deliver adequate vocational training in remote and rural areas. TAFE courses could take place via distance learning and trainers also came to the work site to deliver training to smaller companies in remote areas.

Question 3: How could the Australian apprenticeship model be applied to less developed countries in our region?

Ms Torres said that the issue of delivering quality training to remote areas was particularly relevant to many countries in Asia and the Pacific with large rural populations. Many rural communities had no access to training and the ILO supported approaches which brought training to communities and small enterprises through local training providers or non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

Mr Cognac added that the employment relation of Australian apprenticeships could be a model for other countries in the region where apprentices were sometimes regarded as unpaid trainees. Further, Mr Cognac stressed that companies should realize that they had something to gain from apprentices and that investing in apprenticeships was an investment in the company's future. He mentioned the importance of involving the tripartite partners in this process to ensure that apprentices were covered by basic labour rights and regulations.

The importance of social dialogue and tripartism for successful apprenticeship systems was supported by Mr Fahrurozi, Section Head of the Domestic Apprenticeship Program in the Ministry of Manpower and Transmigration of the Republic of Indonesia. Mr Fahrurozi had sent an email to the panel in which he explained the critical role of political commitment, policy coherence and strong social dialogue mechanisms among all stakeholders for designing and implementing apprenticeship systems. Mr Cognac added that Indonesia had developed very effective and efficient formal and informal apprenticeship programmes which were based on best practices from many other countries.

Ms Persson suggested that Australia had three key lessons for other developing countries. Firstly, successful apprenticeship programmes needed to involve the government as well as the social partners. Secondly, apprenticeship systems should be part of wider qualifications frameworks so that skills and competencies could be applicable across the country and sectors. Finally, existing skills should be recognized through a system of recognition of prior learning. Ms Torres added that some countries in the Asia-Pacific region were now looking into a regional qualifications framework, for instance, countries in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) were developing a model of skills recognition within the ASEAN community.

Question 4: What can be learned from the German apprenticeship 'success story'?

Mr Stadler, a German mechanics apprentice, called in to share his apprenticeship experience. Mr Stadler said that he had undertaken a number of related internships during high school which helped him being selected for a highly competitive three year apprenticeship programme with one of Germany's leading companies for high-end domestic appliances. Mr Stadler told the panel that he shared his time between the work site and three days at a vocational school every other week.

Mr Cognac emphasized that countries in our region could learn from such apprenticeships as they played a critical role in facilitating a smooth school to work transition and provided young people with the necessary skills and knowledge about the world of work at an early age. Ms Torres explained that the close link between training institutions and industry as was the case for Germany was an important lesson for other countries in the Asia-Pacific region since it helped ensure that the curricula at vocational schools were relevant to industry requirements.