

# National Approaches to Improve the School-to-Work Transition

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Public policies supporting learning and employment for young people differ across countries according to institutional attributes, principally the locus and content of upper-secondary education. This brief emphasises that, while particular types of intervention are used in all countries, what works and the time profile of benefits differ markedly across countries.

Many European countries face serious youth problems related to educational attainment, vocational training, and joblessness. These school-to-work difficulties are structural, long-standing ones, which the recent financial crisis has intensified.

## NATIONAL EDUCATIONAL VARIANTS

Policy discussions often implicitly assume that a particular programme that is found to work in one country can, and should, be adopted by others. In fact, particular types of intervention are more frequently chosen, more effective, and more appropriate, in some countries than in others.

Three institutional categories are distinguished here, based on locus and curriculum in upper-secondary education: ‘full-time general’ (with the UK as the

prototype), ‘full-time vocational’ (Sweden and Finland), and apprenticeship (‘part-time vocational’, Germany and Switzerland; see Table). All three educational variants are present in all five countries, and indeed in most other countries, but in these three country groups a single educational type accounts for a majority of enrolments. Other institutions that are potentially relevant to school-to-work patterns, including employment protection and minimum wages, are not considered here.

## YOUTH PROBLEMS

The employment-related problems of youth are typically indicated by both the unemployment rate (which is confined to the youth labour force) and the joblessness rate (which includes inactive – ‘NEET’ – as

### Effectiveness of policy interventions depending on mode of upper-secondary education

Predominant mode of upper-secondary education	Countries	Total enrolment share, 2009			Youth unemployment, %, 2010	Youth inactivity <sup>a</sup> , %, 2010	Policy interventions and their outcomes <sup>b</sup>			
		Full-time general	Full-time vocational	Apprenticeship			Predominant choice	Employment 1 year	Employment 3+ years	Education
Full-time general	GB	70	28	2	19	14	Initial training Job search assistance	+	0	n.a.
Full-time vocational	SWE, FIN	37	55	8	23	8	Job subsidies Initial training	0	+	n.a.
Apprenticeship (part-time vocational)	DE, CH	41	7	53	9	7	Preparatory training Further training Other <sup>c</sup>	– 0 n.a.	– + n.a.	+ – n.a.

Unweighted within-group means. n.a. = not available. a. NEET: not in employment, education or training.

b. Predominance of evaluation results that are: + positive, 0 insignificant, – negative. c. Short apprenticeships and concerted action.

Source: EENEE Analytical Report 13 (reference below).

well as unemployed youth, and refers to the entire youth population). Both rates are higher in the 'full-time general' than in the 'apprenticeship' categories, with the 'full-time vocational' countries in between – high on unemployment, low on inactivity (see Table).

### POLICY CHOICES

The policy measures used to improve the school-to-work transition differ across countries. The 'full-time general' emphasis is on initial training and job search assistance; the 'full-time vocational', on employment subsidies and initial training; and the 'apprenticeship', on preparatory training (for young people who fail to find an apprenticeship place) and further training (for those who have completed formal education).

These policy choices respond to the severity and content of national youth problems. High rates of both unemployment and inactivity in the 'full-time general' category favour short-duration programmes focused on job search and employment subsidies. Participation is typically voluntary, if only because the threat of benefit withdrawal hardly affects inactive youth. In the 'apprenticeship' countries, higher average levels of educational attainment lead governments to opt, both before apprenticeship and after it, for longer-duration, training-based programmes – in which participation tends to be compulsory, as stronger labour-force attachment among non-employed youth makes the threat of loss of benefit more effective. Between these poles sit the 'full-time vocational' countries, which favour employment subsidies and initial training, for young people who have left formal schooling.

In addition, the 'apprenticeship' countries use other policy instruments, focused on the school-to-training transition: viz., the promotion of short-duration (mostly two-year) apprenticeships, to cater directly to educational low achievers; and concerted action, to mobilise employers and the social partners to increase the supply of apprenticeship places.

### POLICY OUTCOMES

Policy effectiveness also differs across countries. Statistically valid evaluations of particular national

programmes suggest that the effect of participation on subsequent employment, a central outcome, varies by institutional category. The programme mix which is typically chosen in the 'full-time general' category tends to increase employment rates for participants at around one year after participation; in the 'apprenticeship' countries, however, this is typically not the case. (The 'full-time vocational' category again sits in between.) Three or more years after participation, however, the pattern is reversed: positive evaluation results are typical for the 'apprenticeship' countries, but not for the 'full-time general' ones, where programme benefits tend not to last.

More detailed evidence for Germany differentiates between preparatory and further training, and covers educational outcomes as well. Preparatory training, which focuses on increasing youth eligibility for apprenticeship, as part of the 'transition system', appears paradoxically to reduce the probability of subsequent employment, even five years afterwards. It does however increase educational participation, which is the immediate objective. Further training does the opposite: it increases employment rates but reduces educational participation. Nothing conclusive can be said about the effectiveness of shortened apprenticeships and concerted action.

### THE NEED FOR NATIONAL APPROACHES

The association across countries between institutions, policy choices and policy outcomes suggests that youth interventions can work in all countries, but what works and the time profile of benefits differ across countries. Countries that focus on general education, which have high youth inactivity, benefit primarily from short-duration mobilisation measures, with largely short-term benefits. Countries that focus on vocational education, particularly those with large apprenticeship systems, tend to have lower youth inactivity and to benefit more from long-duration training, whose effects on educational attainment and employment accrue primarily in the medium to longer term.

For more details see: Marc Piopiunik, Paul Ryan, *Improving the transition between education/training and the labour market: What can we learn from various national approaches?* EENEE Analytical Report No. 13, October 2012, [http://www.eenee.org/doc/eenee\\_ar13.pdf](http://www.eenee.org/doc/eenee_ar13.pdf).

European Expert Network on Economics of Education (EENEE)  
Funded by the European Commission, DG Education and Culture



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