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Learning and Work Institute is an independent policy and research organisation dedicated to lifelong learning, full employment and inclusion.

We research what works, develop new ways of thinking and implement new approaches. Working with partners, we transform people's experiences of learning and employment. What we do benefits individuals, families, communities and the wider economy.

We bring together over 90 years of combined history and heritage from the 'National Institute of Adult Continuing Education' and the 'Centre for Economic & Social Inclusion'.

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SUMMARY REPORT

1. Introduction

Learning and Work Institute is delighted to be working in collaboration with J.P. Morgan to identify ways in which organisations can design and deliver inclusive and high-quality pre-apprenticeship programmes that provide a pathway to apprenticeships for young people, across Europe.

This summary report explores best practice in the design and delivery of pre-apprenticeship programmes across Europe. Pre-apprenticeship programmes are defined as programmes targeted at young people aged 16-24, where the aim is progression to an apprenticeship. Across Europe, some programmes are explicitly called 'pre-apprenticeships' whilst others have specific brand names. Such programmes typically prepare young people for apprenticeships by providing a combination of vocational training and hands-on experience, however, the components vary by individual programme.

The emerging findings outlined in this report are based on:

- A desk-based literature review of official reports and evaluations, independent studies and peer-reviewed research focussed on pre-apprenticeships across Europe.
- An online call for evidence.
- In-depth interviews with providers of pre-apprenticeship programmes.
- Deep dive study visits with pre-apprenticeship programmes across Europe
- A knowledge exchange workshop for providers and other stakeholders from across Europe.

For further information about this project, please contact Nicola.aylward@learningandwork.org.uk

Practical resources for pre-apprenticeship providers

This summary report is accompanied by a suite of **practical resources** for pre-apprenticeship providers and other employment readiness training providers. The resources were developed in consultation with providers and include:

- An interactive guide to designing and delivering pre-apprenticeship programmes.
- Detailed case studies of 5 pre-apprenticeship programmes.
- 5 short films showcasing effective practice across Europe.
- Top tips for designing and delivering pre-apprenticeship programmes.

2. Context

The recession of 2007/08 disproportionately affected young people across Europe, with rates of youth unemployment rising dramatically until 2013. Despite falling back since 2013, a number of countries, including Italy, Spain and Greece, still had youth unemployment rates of over 35%¹ in 2017. In the EU, 6.3 million young people, equivalent to almost 1 in 8 of those aged 15-24 were classed as Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) in 2016. Whilst this number has fallen dramatically from a peak in 2013 it still remains above the 2008 level.²

Apprenticeships have a crucial role to play in enabling young people to enter and progress within the labour market. Effective pre-apprenticeship programmes provide a direct pathway to apprenticeships. They enable young people who have not previously been successful in making positive and sustained transitions in vocational education and training, or into employment, the opportunity to develop the specific skills, experience and attributes they need to gain an apprenticeship. Whilst there is variation in the policy frameworks and systems for delivering apprenticeships, the prevalence of apprenticeships across Europe has led to an increased focus on pre-apprenticeship programmes. To assist member states, the European Commission has sought to improve the rigour of pre-apprenticeships across Europe through the publication of its Recommendation for a Quality Framework for Traineeships in 2013. The Framework is non-legally binding but has nevertheless brought some commonalities to the delivery of pre-apprenticeships in the EU.

The key conditions for better and more accessible schemes set out in the Framework are:

- There should be a written agreement between the trainee and pre-apprenticeship provider setting out the objectives of the pre-apprenticeship, working conditions, duration and financial compensation.
- Pre-apprenticeships should be supervised, and progress monitored.
- They should be of a reasonable duration that, in principle, does not exceed six months, except where justified.
- Providers should encourage proper recognition of the skills and knowledge gained through an assessment and certification.
- It is crucial to ensure that persons with disabilities are able to participate in pre-apprenticeships.
- It is important to involve all relevant players (social partners, civil society organisations and, especially, youth organisations) in formulating guidelines and monitoring and evaluating implementation of the framework.

The Framework stated that, *“A smooth transition from education to employment is crucial for enhancing the chances of young people on the labour market. Improving young people’s education and facilitating their transition to employment are necessary for achieving the Europe 2020 headline target of aiming to reach a 75% employment rate of women and men aged 20-64 by 2020. Guideline 8 on the employment policies of the Member States calls on the Member*

1 <https://www.statista.com/statistics/266228/youth-unemployment-rate-in-eu-countries/> (August 2017 data)
2 <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=89&langId=en&newsId=2811&furtherNews=yes>



States to enact schemes to help young people and in particular those not in employment, education or training find initial employment, job experience, or further education and training opportunities.

There is evidence that links exist between the quality of the traineeship and the employment outcome. The value of traineeships in easing the transition to employment depends on their quality in terms of learning content and working conditions. Quality traineeships bring direct productivity benefits, improve labour market matching and promote mobility, notably by decreasing search and matching costs both for enterprises and for trainees".

The EU's Joint Employment Report 2017³ found that as a result of the quality Framework, specific efforts to better regulate pre-apprenticeships have been stepped up. Half of the EU Member States have undertaken, or plan to undertake, legal changes to align their national practice with the Quality Framework. In the countries

which have already adapted their legislation (Bulgaria, France, Germany, Greece, Lithuania, Portugal and Spain) most of the reforms include limiting the duration of pre-apprenticeships to six months, (12 months in Bulgaria), clarifying the conditions for longer pre-apprenticeships and assigning mentors to provide guidance and monitor progress during the programme.

By identifying best practices in the design and delivery of pre-apprenticeship programmes across Europe, and facilitating the exchange of knowledge and practical resources, L&W hopes that this project will provide the momentum and insight to drive further progress in securing the delivery of high quality, inclusive pre-apprenticeship programmes. Programmes that will make a real difference to the lives of young people who have previously found it difficult to make linear and sustained transitions into apprenticeships and employment.

3 EU, Joint Employment Report (2017c) As adopted by the EPSCO Council on 3rd March 2017

3. Findings

3.1 Programme entry

Pre-apprenticeships are predominantly targeted at young people who are low skilled and face barriers to work and apprenticeships. They are often economically or socially disadvantaged young people who are unemployed, not in education, employment or training (NEET) or early school leavers. Additionally, some providers directly target sub-groups with specific needs or from particular backgrounds (e.g. homeless young people, ex-offenders, young people with mental health difficulties or young people in government care/care leavers). Many young people classified as not in education, employment or training (NEET) present with complex needs, even if such individuals are not the direct target of a programme.

Vocational learning is often not well understood, and pre-apprenticeship providers may need to discuss vocational opportunities in a broader sense when marketing their programmes. Clear messaging that focusses on pre-apprenticeships as a direct route to apprenticeships has proved to be effective in making the pre-apprenticeship offer attractive. In addition to marketing directly to young people, typically via outreach and online marketing (e.g. through social media), providers often run events and activities to promote their programmes as well as relying on referrals from other agencies. This can include 'work tasters' and job-shadowing opportunities.

Assessing potential trainees is an essential part of all effective pre-apprenticeship programmes, to explore expectations, aspirations, capabilities

and skills. Assessment typically involves some form of basic or functional skills assessment and a discussion with tutors or other programme staff. This allows barriers to learning to be identified from the outset and suitable workplace opportunities identified. Making a successful match between trainees and their work placement host is critical in achieving successful programme completion and progression to an apprenticeship and such matching is reliant on comprehensive assessment information.

Some programmes put 'pre-apprenticeship agreements' in place, setting out roles and responsibilities of the trainee, learning provider and employer. This can help to establish expectations and commitment and in turn contributes to securing good outcomes.

3.2 Programme design and delivery

Whilst every programme offers something unique, there is a range of common elements to pre-apprenticeship programmes that are most likely to secure positive outcomes for young people. These are preparatory work to build learner confidence; basic skills provision; support such as mentoring and Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG); work experience placements and other interactions with employers, and; the need for flexibility in provision.

- **Preparatory work to build learner confidence**

Preparatory activities are a key component of best practice in effective pre-apprenticeship programmes. Such activities are important

in developing levels of confidence and self-esteem. They can take the form of role play interviews or CV preparation, with activities carefully sequenced to lead up to contact with real employers (e.g. through mock interviews initially taking place with programme staff). Sometimes a number of sessions are needed for one activity, e.g. – pre-session to introduce/inform; sessions with an employer; feedback, follow up reflection session. Such interactions help to develop communication skills and prepare trainees for a real working environment. Employability skills are often subtly embedded into team building, enrichment, and exploration activities.

● **Basic Skills provision**

The quality and relevance of the learning that young people engage in is central to their employment chances. Employers consistently emphasise the importance of good basic skills in the workplace - young people need the basics of literacy and numeracy on which to build and to create the foundations for successful careers. In addition to occupation-specific skills, employers also increasingly demand transferable skills (e.g. ability to work in a team, creative thinking and problem solving). Workplace learning can play a key role by providing a favourable learning environment for the development of many soft skills and integrating key skills such as basic numeracy and literacy can be done in practical contexts.

Frameworks for pre-apprenticeship programmes vary within individual countries but broadly emphasise the need to deliver learning in relation to work-related skills within which there

is an implicit (and at times explicit) assumption to include a combination of:

- **Basic skills:** Programmes typically include literacy and numeracy instruction, and sometimes foreign language training.
- **Vocational skills:** In some programmes, participants develop foundation skills related to a particular industry or apprenticeship occupation. In others, the focus is on career exploration, with participants learning about various occupations.
- **Soft skills:** This includes the skills that young people need to find and obtain a work-based learning opportunity (e.g. job search, CV writing and interview skills), as well as the skills needed to succeed in the workplace (e.g. time-keeping, teamwork, resilience)

The delivery of basic skills training in pre-apprenticeships, however, requires careful handling. Trainees can be resistant to such training and may be unlikely to engage with classroom-based learning, often because of poor experiences in compulsory education. Best practice suggests that the development of young people's basic skills is most effective when embedded throughout pre-apprenticeship learning activity, ideally as a seamless part of the wider programme.

● **Mentoring, information, advice and guidance (IAG) and other forms of support**

In the most effective programmes, support within pre-apprenticeship programmes is designed in a way that encourages take up: support is easily accessible; adapted to the

diverse needs of individuals, including those with low motivation and limited independent learning skills, and; marketed in a positive way to avoid it being stigmatising.

Many pre-apprenticeship providers place some form of mentoring at the heart of their provision for young people. Mentors can be tutors, specialist support staff, peers or employer representatives. They can be existing provider staff or work for other partner organisations, and young people can be given access to more than one type of mentor during the programme. Mentoring can take the form of regularly scheduled one to one support meetings, a more ad hoc arrangement based on emerging needs, or a combination of both.

Offering young people this type of personalised support allows them to talk through their experiences and aspirations and highlight any difficulties they are facing. This means that providers have better intelligence about problems as and when they arise and are therefore more able to respond in an appropriate and timely manner, helping to retain young people and improve their experience of the programme. In addition, mentors may be the only available adult role model for many young people, and the mentor/mentee relationship, therefore, provides opportunities to enhance young people's feelings of confidence, self-esteem, and self-worth. Mentoring can play a particularly important role in programmes which specifically target young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. For example,

programmes which work with young people who have had negative educational experiences, often have a strong focus on addressing emotional/behavioural barriers that might hamper young people's success.

The transition from school to work is challenging for many young people and a lack of knowledge, information and/or poor choice of educational path or career can lead to inactivity and unemployment. IAG provision typically therefore forms a key part of effective pre-apprenticeship programmes.

- **Work experience placements and other direct interactions with employers**

Work experience placements provide invaluable experience and real-life exposure to the world of work. For this reason, work experience placements are a key component of most pre-apprenticeship programmes and are often integral to achieving programme aims. The most effective placements are personalised and tailored to the needs, interests, and ambitions of the individual young people and employers involved. This typically requires providers, employers, and learners to work together at the design stage to ensure there is a mutual understanding of which activities would be most effective. During the placement, it is important to monitor progress and ensure that both learner and employer benefit from the experience. However, this approach is time and resource intensive, and may not suit smaller employers.



Ensuring a good match between trainee and host is central to achieving a successful outcome at the end of a pre-apprenticeship, and in ensuring high completion rates on the programme. For this, there need to be clear systems in place to assess the skills and capabilities of young people and matching to ensure that employers can successfully address trainees' learning and support needs.

Some providers offer sector-specific pre-apprenticeship programmes, with work placements taking place only with employers from certain sectors, whereas others try to reflect the specific interests of young people in securing diverse work placements for them.

The latter approach requires providers to have a more extensive network of available employers and may, therefore, need a greater investment in employer engagement. In practice, it seems that providers often do the best they can to offer relevant placements, but many are limited by the availability of local employers.

Some young people, particularly those with the acutest additional needs, may benefit from in-house work experience placements with training providers rather than going straight into real workplaces.

Work experience placements, whatever their form, are an important aspect of effective pre-apprenticeship provision. Well-designed

placements reflect the interests and needs of both employers and trainees and involve them in the planning process to manage expectations. In addition, placements need to be adequately monitored so that all parties benefit from the experience, and any problems can be identified and dealt with before they threaten the successful completion of the placement.

Other forms of direct interaction with employers are also important components of many effective pre-apprenticeship programmes. This can include:

- Hearing from employers who tell their own, personal story of how they became successful. This can be particularly effective for young people with low confidence and aspirations, and particularly if they can identify with the employer, for example if they come from a particular background or if they started their career with low academic achievement.
- One to one support from employers who act as advisers and mentors to young people. This personalised support enables young people to become self-aware; it 'builds up' young people, helping them to make and execute plans; keep on track when they are at risk of dropping out; talk through difficulties. There may be no other adult in a young person's life who is taking on this role. This support, in itself, from an employer boosts confidence and self-esteem and instils a greater sense of self-worth.
- Real tasks and challenges set by employers.

This can enable young people with previously low attainment and confidence to perform well and show great potential. This in turn boosts confidence and motivation.

● Flexible provision

Flexible provision is considered a crucial element of best practice in the most effective pre-apprenticeship programmes. It is seen as essential that providers do not apply a 'one size fits all' approach. Flexibility is required to ensure that programmes address the specific barriers of each individual participant. Programmes can do this by:

- varying the time frames over which they operate.
- investing more heavily in basic skills provision.
- offering tailored learning opportunities.
- adapting the types and level of personal support they offer individuals.

A flexible approach is particularly important in engaging young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, who often face specific barriers to labour market entry which need to be overcome as part of the programme.

3.3 Partnerships and employer engagement

Engaging employers in pre-apprenticeships is necessary not only to facilitate well planned and executed work placements: their involvement can also ensure that the design of programmes



reflects labour market needs and maximises opportunities to progress to an apprenticeship. The alignment of pre-apprenticeships to national, regional or local labour market needs, which in turn inform the curriculum or framework, is a key factor in achieving successful outcomes.

However, most employers are likely to need the support of providers in offering high quality placements and supporting young people during their time on site. This is particularly the case for young people who have additional support needs.

Employer engagement can also help by bringing employee representatives together with

young people - exposure which benefits both parties. Young people on pre-apprenticeships can find inspiration in the experiences of employers, particularly if they share personal characteristics or experiences (e.g. disabilities or low educational attainment) and meeting young people can overcome any negative stereotypes employers may hold.

Other partnerships, for example with schools, public authorities, public employment services, career guidance providers, youth organisations and trade unions, all help in the development and execution of successful pre-apprenticeship programmes. Partners can offer specialist support to trainees, recruit or refer

to programmes, deliver specific programme elements and/or help by providing oversight or advice. Effective partnerships add real value to the pre-apprenticeship offer in many ways.

3.4 Supporting progression

Effective pre-apprenticeship providers can achieve high progression rates into apprenticeships even when working with young people with multiple barriers or from very disadvantaged backgrounds. Some providers embed a focus on progression into every element of their programme, from the assessment of young people to the selection of employers and the development of ongoing relationships with them, into exit interviews and maximising learning from placements. Linking specific programme inputs to progression outcomes, however, requires further data and analysis.

In most cases pre-apprenticeships are not a certified course, as young people often do not complete a qualification, however, best practice in delivering pre-apprenticeship programmes highlights that young people should receive formal recognition of their learning and achievement on a pre-apprenticeship programme. There are many ways in which

learning can be recognised, which can be simple and yet effective. For example, providing young people with a certificate of participation, which recognises their learning as well as the successful completion of work placements.

3.5 Monitoring and evaluation

There is a lack of robust evaluation data to drive forward improvements in pre-apprenticeships, and providers should be encouraged to measure a range of outcomes that go beyond monitoring how many young people they work with, or even progression rate data. When done well, monitoring systems need to capture quantitative data and qualitative information at each stage – from initial engagement with a programme, drop outs (and reasons for doing so), follow-up work, and outcomes. Such monitoring systems can be coupled with learner surveys, which provide the learners' perspectives on the support received. This data and information is vital to identify how a programme could be improved and an essential pre-requisite for scalability. Soft and hard outcomes are both important, and impact assessment is necessary to establish how pre-apprenticeships improve on a 'do nothing' approach.

4. Lessons learnt

To facilitate successful **programme entry and recruitment**, pre-apprenticeship providers should focus on:

- Engaging young people before they drop out of learning, where this is possible.
- Clearly outlining the benefits of pre-apprenticeships in terms of how they can lead to apprenticeships and better job, career and wage outcomes for participants.
- Investing in a range of marketing approaches which combine events, online marketing and outreach to attract and inform young people and their parents, with partner engagement to secure appropriate referrals.
- Careful and sensitive assessment of young people's capabilities, skills, aspirations and needs, using IT systems to do this where appropriate, prior to their entry to a programme.
- Using the data obtained from high quality initial assessments to support successful matches between young people and employers.

Best practice in **programme design** involves:

- Developing clear quality assurance frameworks and strong provider oversight.
- Working to clearly defined and realistic goals for all parties.
- Building in sufficient flexibility to meet

individual needs and being holistic enough to directly tackle a range of individual barriers to labour market entry.

Success in **programme delivery** involves:

- Providing preparatory activities and sequenced learning as preparation for workplace-based elements where necessary.
- Supporting basic skills development through workplace learning which embeds general, vocational and soft skills throughout.
- Offering a support package which combines a mix of core support - offered to all trainees as part of the programme (e.g. mentoring and high quality IAG) - with specifically tailored and/or specialist provision to address specific needs.
- Personalised work experience placements selected for young people on the basis of their skills and interests, with employers who offer high-quality placements that have clear progression routes into apprenticeships.

Successful **partnership working, and employer engagement** requires:

- Committed partners who add value to the offer and help to create a 'pathways' approach which provides a seamless transition between school and work.
- Utilising partners in a way that reflects their specific strengths to enhance the quality, content or inclusivity of the programme.
- Providers to work with employers in the design

of programmes to ensure they reflect labour market needs and lead to positive outcomes for both young people and employers alike.

- Employers to be supported so that they can develop realistic expectations, run high quality placements, deal with issues as they arise and provide suitable progression opportunities into apprenticeships for the young people they work with.

To **support progression into apprenticeships**, effective providers typically use:

- Careful participant assessment before a young person starts a pre-apprenticeship, and on an ongoing basis.
- A strong focus on exit interviews and learning from work placements.

- Ongoing work placement monitoring.
- A clear focus on working with employers who offer real opportunities for progression to apprenticeships.

There is little existing evidence, however, which directly links individual programme elements to work and education outcomes. There is also generally a need for better **monitoring and evaluation** of pre-apprenticeships, particularly in terms of impact and outcomes, to promote a culture of continual feedback and improvement.

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