Chapter 6. Equity and inclusion in apprenticeship in England

Recent reforms of apprenticeship in England have not usually taken equity as an explicit objective, apart from some special measures and targets such as for minority group participation. Instead, the emphasis has been on establishing a high-quality, high status apprenticeship brand, with higher-level apprenticeships. While the objective of these reforms is commendable, they could risk leaving behind some weaker performers who will find it harder to obtain and complete more demanding apprenticeships. This chapter argues that building on the experience of traineeships, England should further explore, in the light of evidence and experience, pre-apprenticeship and alternative apprenticeship programmes that effectively prepare young people to undertake a full apprenticeship, equip them with basic and employability skills, and grant them workplace experience and career advice.

Introduction: Equity and apprenticeship policy

How apprenticeship reform in England bears on social mobility

In principle apprenticeships should be a vehicle for social mobility

In England, one effect of the wide-ranging apprenticeship reforms is to identify apprenticeship as one of the main potential routes by which young people may gain access to good jobs and careers. Given this expanded role, it may be expected that apprenticeship should contribute to social mobility, by facilitating the advance of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds into rewarding careers. This aspiration is supported by international experience, which shows, for example, that countries with strong dual system apprenticeship systems have lower rates of NEET among young people (Quintini and Martin, 2006).

But realising this aspiration involves significant challenges

Apprenticeships have often, at least up to now, involved relatively low-level qualifications, and often in fields of study characterised by low pay. The most desirable, higher-level apprenticeships (Level 4 and 5) leading to well paid jobs have mostly been filled by older apprentices aged 25 and above (DfE, 2016). The majority of these higher-level apprentices were white, similarly to Level 2 and 3 apprentices (DfE, 2016). Alongside the more general equity challenges, some groups, including minorities, may therefore face particular obstacles in apprenticeship (see for example Beck at al., 2006a; Beck at al., 2006b; Fuller and Unwin, 2014).

Moving apprenticeship upmarket may advance the labour market prospects of some

Apart from some special measures and targets such as for minority group participation, recent reforms to apprenticeship have not usually taken equity as an explicit objective. Instead, the emphasis has been on establishing a high-quality, high status apprenticeship brand, with higher-level apprenticeships. While the objective of these reforms is commendable, they could risk leaving behind some weaker performers who will find it harder to obtain and complete more demanding apprenticeships.

England has more young people with weak basic skills than other countries

In England in 2012 approaching one-third (29%) of 16-24 year-olds had weak basic skills in the sense of numeracy and/or literacy below Level 2 in the PIAAC survey, one of the highest levels among OECD countries in the survey, and three times the level of a strong performer like the Netherlands (9%) and substantially more than – say – Germany (19%). While those from less advantaged family backgrounds are everywhere more likely to suffer from weak basic skills, this factor of inheritance is stronger in England than in most other countries (see Kuczera, Field and Windisch, 2016). School reforms are addressing weakness in initial basic skills acquisition, but any improvements will take some time. In the short run, it would be very unfortunate if this group of poorly skilled school leavers was left behind by a move 'upmarket' of apprenticeship and other vocational qualifications. To meet this challenge, England needs measures to engage these young people through apprenticeships as well as in other ways. This means finding effective ways of preparing young people at risk so that they have the skills to gain an apprenticeship place, supporting them through to successful completion, and ensuring that the apprenticeship can lead to higher levels of qualification and a rewarding career.

Profound challenges lie on the demand side

As well as creating demanding, high status apprentice qualifications, employers will need to offer apprenticeships to young people with weak basic skills who may not present themselves as the most attractive candidates. Chapter 2, in the context of youth apprenticeship, describes a range of changes in the labour market faced by young people, which mean that low-skilled young people entering the labour market are very often under-employed, or in insecure or temporary work, and therefore without a career ladder. Collectively these changes are placing an increasing segment of the labour force, particularly young people, outside the longer-term relationship between employer and employee that might favour an employer's commitment to training. Many studies (e.g. Keep and James, 2011) argue that major challenges in England lie on the demand side, with many employers having an entrenched reliance on substantial numbers of low-skilled workers and few incentives to promote their upskilling. These labour market factors, unless they are separately addressed, may put a substantial brake on the capacity of the education and training system, including apprenticeship, to deliver career advance to young people.

How other countries address equity through apprenticeship

Countries address the challenge both before and during apprenticeships

Other countries have sought to build inclusive apprenticeship systems, mainly through additional preparation for disadvantaged young people to enable them to enter apprenticeships, and targeted support during apprenticeships to help them through to successful completion. This chapter looks at these issues, and draws extensively on a recent OECD survey of work-based learning as a means of supporting school to work transition (Kis, 2016). Countries have approached equity in apprenticeship systems using several policy tools as set out below. The first three bullet points will be considered in more depth in the policy discussion which follows. The fourth bullet point, on financial incentives, is looked at briefly here.

- Pre-apprenticeship schemes designed to prepare young people for good quality apprenticeships leading to rewarding careers. Such pre-apprenticeship schemes are not necessarily always designed for those at risk – sometimes they may also meet the needs of those who, for one reason or another, need preparation before entering apprenticeship. In some contexts, pre-apprenticeship may be a near-universal stage that young people pass through before entering full apprenticeships.
- Special forms of apprenticeship are sometimes used to include young people at risk. Often, they may be designed so as to encourage participants to transition into regular apprenticeship, and in this sense they are also a form of pre-apprenticeship. But usually they also allow for graduation within the special apprenticeship scheme, offering a qualification with labour market value.
- Programmes of support during apprenticeships to assist apprentices to cope with and succeed in demanding training programmes.
- Direct financial incentives to providers and/or employers to take apprentices from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Some countries offer financial incentives

Incentives may be offered to employers to take on apprentices from certain designated equity groups (see Box 6.1). In England, providers currently receive an additional GBP 600 for training on a framework an apprentice who lives in the top 10% of deprived areas (as per the Index of Multiple Deprivation), GBP 300 for any apprentice who lives in the next

10% of deprived areas (the 10-20% range), and GBP 200 for those in the next 7% (the 20-27% range).

But there is a risk of subsidising training that would have been offered anyway

While targeted financial assistance seems appealing, it is hard to get right. For example, in Germany a training bonus scheme targeted youth who had unsuccessfully applied for an apprenticeship, had lower secondary schooling or less, or had learning difficulties or a disability (Bonin et al., 2013). Employers received between EUR 4 000 and 6 000 per additional apprentice, half of which was paid after a four-month probationary period and half when the apprentice took their final exam. The bonus was available to employers where the number of apprenticeship positions, including disadvantaged apprentices, was higher than on average during the preceding three years. For hiring disabled apprentices, a firm could receive an additional 30%. But evaluation (Bonin et al., 2013) found that over 90% of subsidised apprentices would have been hired even without the bonus. Employers reported that better basic skills among applicants and more support for weaker apprentices during training would be more helpful than a subsidy. Müehlemann (2016) argues that the bonus for disadvantaged apprentices was too low to make a difference, and that it would be hard to define an effective level of subsidy. This reflects the problem of cost-benefit heterogeneity, discussed in Chapter 4.

Box 6.1. Incentives to employers taking disadvantaged apprentices

In Australia, employers receive AUD 1 250 when at the Certificate II level they take an apprentice who belongs to a nominated 'equity group'. Equity groups include indigenous Australians, job seekers with major barriers to employment, school-based apprentices, apprentices working in a rural or regional area, and apprentices with disabilities.

In Austria, for apprentices with learning difficulties, financial support is available to cover the costs of additionally required courses (e.g. literacy support), covering costs up to EUR 3 000 per apprentice. In addition, if the apprentice must repeat the year, employers will be compensated for the resulting extra costs (e.g. apprentice wage).

In France firms benefit from a higher tax break (EUR 2 200 instead of EUR 1 600 per apprentice) if the apprentice is disadvantaged and is in the first year of their training programme. Eligible apprentices include those who are disabled, unqualified people aged 16-25 needing support for transition into professional life, and those aged 18-22 who have signed a voluntary integration contract (*contrat de volontariat pour l'insertion*) that targets youth most disconnected from employment.

Source: Australian Government (2016), Apprenticeships website, www.australianapprenticeships.gov.au; WKO (2016), Wirtschaftskammer Österreich (Austrian Economic Chambers), "Überblick der Lehrlingsförderungen", www.wko.at; Service-Public-Pro (2016), "Crédit d'impôt apprentissage", www.service-public.fr/professionnels-entreprises.

Policy issue 6.1: Developing pre-apprenticeships and special apprenticeship schemes

Challenge: Ensuring adequate provision of pre-apprenticeships

Measures are needed to prepare young people with weak school attainment for apprenticeship

For the most desirable apprenticeships, offering good training and a rewarding career, employers will naturally seek out the most talented rather than those most in need. Often, failure to obtain a desired apprenticeship is not because of any lack of overall employer demand for apprentices, but rather because employers are reluctant to accept the candidates they are offered as they see them as lacking the basic numeracy, literacy and employability skills that will support apprenticeship learning, and translate into a valuable skilled worker in the future.

One response in many countries is preparatory programmes or 'pre-apprenticeships'

'Pre-apprenticeship' programmes, found in many countries, usually aim to develop the general, vocational and soft skills (including employability skills) that help young people to obtain and successfully complete an apprenticeship. They typically combine education in schools with elements of work-based learning. Such programmes often also offer career orientation, assisting young people understand the realities of different career options. Such orientation can help young people to refine or modify their career targets, and potential apprenticeship programme, in the light of experience. Programmes may provide credit towards a regular apprenticeship. They are called bridging programmes in Switzerland, transition programmes in Germany, and pre-apprenticeship in Australia and the United States. Table 6.1, adapted from Kis, (2016) summarises initiatives in selected OECD countries.

Such pre-apprenticeships often, but not always, are designed for young people at risk

As they are preparatory programmes, pre-apprenticeship programmes often do serve the needs of young people at risk of dropout, by re-engaging them with learning, familiarising them with working life, and preparing them for the challenges of regular apprenticeship. But they can also meet the needs of students, including able students who simply need some preparation before entering apprenticeship. Sometimes this approach is made general. For example, in Norway, the two years of school-based vocational education and training which normally precedes an apprenticeship in the form of a work placement may be conceived as a pre-apprenticeship which is pursued by all.

Special apprenticeships designed for young people at risk

Alongside programmes designed to prepare for entrance to apprenticeship, some countries offer special forms of apprenticeship designed for young people who may not be adequately prepared for regular apprenticeship or school-based options. They often (like pre-apprenticeships) channel young people into regular apprenticeships and prepare for a specific occupation by providing a lower level vocational qualification.

Traineeships in England show much promise

The Richard review argued that "a significant new offer should be introduced to support young people's transition into work, developing their employability skills, and where relevant, preparing them for a high skilled apprenticeship. The new programme – 'traineeships' perhaps - should replace existing apprenticeships where they are linked to lower skilled jobs" (Richard, 2012). In response, the traineeships now in place are designed

to help young people aged 16 to 24 with the training, English, maths and work experience needed to secure an apprenticeship or employment. They typically involve 200- 400 guided learning hours of training and work experience over a period of a few months (6 months is maximum). Just under 20 000 young people started traineeships in 2014/15, growing to just over 24 000 in 2015/16, but in 2016/2017 starts decreased by 15% in comparison to the previous year (DfE, 2017). Initial process evaluation results are favourable with two-thirds of graduate trainees going on to a mix of apprenticeship (22%), employment (28%) and further learning (17%) (BIS, 2015). Of those who started or completed a traineeship in 2013/14, 59% progressed into sustained employment and 39% into sustained learning (BIS, 2015).

Such pre-apprenticeship programmes are more common and more substantial in many other countries

Given their duration and objectives, traineeships in England are classified as pre-apprenticeships, and compared with similar initiatives elsewhere. In some European countries, pre-apprenticeship is both more common than in England, and the programmes are also more substantial (with programmes usually of a *minimum* of 6 months, rather than a *maximum* of 6 months, as in English traineeships). While in England, given 24 000 trainee starts in 2015/16 there are now around 5 pre-apprentices (traineeship participants) for every 100 new apprentices, the equivalent figure for Switzerland in 2012 was 22 pre-apprentices for every 100 new apprentices, and for Germany in 2013 was 52; Landert and Eberli, 2015). For England to match this ratio with 500 000 apprentice starts per year (roughly the current figure), this would require between 100 and 250 thousand traineeships annually, between four and ten times the present figure.

Policy pointer 6.1: Developing pre-apprenticeships and special apprenticeship schemes

A key element in the success of a reformed apprenticeship system will be its capacity to include and engage those from disadvantaged backgrounds, and those who leave school with few skills. Building on the experience of traineeships, further explore, in the light of evidence and experience, pre-apprenticeship and alternative apprenticeship programmes that effectively prepare young people to undertake a full apprenticeship, equip them with basic and employability skills, and grant them workplace experience and career advice.

Analysis: International experience with pre-apprenticeships

There is a strong argument in principle for expanding and developing pre-apprenticeships

Given, as described above, a large cohort of young people in England with weak basic skills, and an expanding apprenticeship system with rising standards and demands, there is a big need to bridge the gap, with measures that transition young people into apprenticeships, including traineeships (but not necessarily limited to them). Given a limited evidence base, the precise modalities of such programmes will require development in the light of evaluation and monitoring, drawing on international experience. Since pre-apprenticeship programmes are not eligible for levy funding, effective funding arrangements will need to be in place.

Some have suggested reconfiguring some existing youth apprenticeships as pre-apprenticeship

The traineeships programme appears to be relatively successful in the light of initial evaluations, but it has not replaced lower level apprenticeships, as proposed in the Richard

review. As discussed in Chapter 2 in connection with youth apprenticeships, in an IPPR study, Pullen and Dromey (2016) argue that Level 2 apprenticeships for 16-18 year-olds should be replaced by a pre-apprenticeship programme that would include more general education and a recognised qualification, and therefore be more appropriate to 16-18 year-olds.

Across countries, pre-apprenticeships, often organised locally, take diverse forms

Looked at across countries, pre-apprenticeship programmes are exceptionally diverse, partly reflecting the fact that they are often organised locally or regionally. For example, in Switzerland, some programmes are regulated at federal level and funded by unemployment insurance, while others (bridging measures) are funded by cantons and communities but supported by federal funds. Most bridging programmes are provided by public institutions, but 12% of provision is delivered by private entities (Landert and Eberli, 2015). Table 6.1 describes initiatives preparing young people for apprenticeships.

Evaluations are essential to identify what works

Hard evidence on the success or otherwise of pre-apprenticeship is patchy, and difficult to compare with alternative measures for youth at risk. Evaluations, unsurprisingly given the way in which participants are selected, suggest that pre-apprenticeship participants tend to have weaker skills and qualifications than those who choose other learning pathways, and often have higher dropout rates *(Autorengruppe Bildungsberichterstattung*, 2016; Karmel and Oliver, 2011). In Australia, pre-apprenticeship participants had higher than average completion rates of apprenticeship in construction and electro-technology, but not in engineering trades and hairdressing (Karmel and Oliver, 2011).

Table 6.1. Pre-apprenticeship programmes in selected OECD countries

Country	Programme name	Target group	Duration	Content	Regulatory framework
Australia	Pre-apprenticeship		Typically 6-12 months	General employability skills, trade skills specific to a particular apprenticeship occupation	No national definition or regulatory framework, currently no Commonwealth funding (previous funding programmes were ceased)
England (UK)	Traineeship	Youth aged 16-24 qualified below Level 3 with little work experience and not in employment (not intended for the most disengaged young people, who require intensive support)	6 weeks to 6 months	Work experience placement (100-240 hours); work preparation training (including soft skills); English and mathematics if needed	Framework for delivery defines core content and eligibility criteria. Funded by the Education Funding Agency for 16-19 year-olds and by the Adult Skills Budget for 19-24 year-olds. Exact content to be agreed between training provider and employer
Germany	Introductory training (*Einsiegsqualifizerung*), including a variant called "EQ Plus"	Youth aged 16-25. EQ Plus targets youth with learning difficulties and those socially disadvantaged	6-12 months	Work-based learning under a contract concluded with a training company. Optional school-based component. Under EQ Plus: social and educational support, additional school-based and company-based tutoring, mentoring	Regulatory framework provided by the National Training Pact. Funded by local employment agencies and job centres
	Preparatory VET year (*Berufsvorbereitungs-jahr*, BVJ)	Youth aged under 18 who completed compulsory education (including those without a lower secondary qualification)	1 year (may be extended to 18 months)	General subjects (German, mathematics, English) at vocational school (leading to a lower secondary qualification). Exploration of three occupational fields through theory and practice (including work placements)	
	Basic vocational year (*Berufsgrundbildungsjahr*, BGJ)	Youth who have obtained a lower secondary qualification	1 year	Vocational theory and practice in a particular field taught at a vocational school, with an element of work placement (either in a block or alternating two days at school and three days at work)	
Scotland (UK)	Certificate of Work Readiness	16-24 year-olds	10-12 weeks	3-4 weeks of off-the-job training (e.g. dealing with work situations, responsibilities of employment, personal development self and work and skills for customer care). 190 hours of work experience	It can be funded by the Employability Fund – Scottish Government funding administered through Skills Development Scotland

Country	Programme name	Target group	Duration	Content	Regulatory framework
Switzerland	SEMO (motivational semester)	Youth under the age of 25 who completed compulsory education	6 months (may be extended to 9.5 months)	1-2 days per week at a vocational school	Regulated by the Swiss State Secretariat for Economic Affairs, funded through unemployment insurance. Co-ordinated by cantonal labour offices. Programmes organised/delivered by sponsors (e.g. associations, foundations, labour offices etc.)
	Bridging measures	Youth who have finished lower secondary education	1 year	Language skills, mathematics, motivation and career guidance. Either school-based or combined school and work-based training. Some participants have a pre-apprenticeship contract with their training company. A special programme targets migrants	Funded by cantons and communities
United States	Pre-apprenticeship		Not specified	Literacy, mathematics, English and work-readiness skills delivered through classroom instruction and industry-based training	No mandatory framework. The Employment and Training Administration defined a pre-apprenticeship quality framework that aims to build a broader understanding of pre-apprenticeship programmes

Source: Adapted from Kis, V. (2016), "Work-based learning for youth at risk: Getting employers on board", *OECD Education Working Papers*, No. 150, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/5e122a91-en.

Special forms of apprenticeship are targeted at youth at risk

These programmes are typically shorter than regular apprenticeships and target young people who are less academically oriented and are at risk of dropping out from the mainstream education. In Norway, shorter two-year apprenticeships (*Praksisbrev*) are provided alongside regular apprenticeships lasting four years (Norwegian Ministry of Education, n.d). Similarly, Switzerland offers two-year EBA apprenticeships (*Grundbildung mit Eidgenössischem Berufsattest*) designed for youth who face difficulties at school, struggle to find a three or four-year apprenticeship, or risk dropping out. These programmes in Norway and Switzerland lead to qualifications that are recognised both on the labour market and within the education system, and allow graduates to continue into regular apprenticeship. Available evidence points to positive outcomes from these programmes. In Norway the programme is now being scaled up after a positive evaluation of the pilot. In Switzerland nearly half of the programme completers proceed to higher-level apprenticeships, and among those who do not, 75% find a job upon completion (Kis, 2016). The fact that these programmes end with a formal qualification is an important feature. (Kammermann et al., 2011) argues that two-year apprenticeships leading to a qualification are associated with better labour market outcomes than identical but uncertified programmes. In Switzerland in 2014, there were 5 900 students in two-year apprenticeship as compared to 61 000 in regular programmes (SERI, 2016).

Is a special apprenticeship an option for England?

Evidence from different countries, including Switzerland, suggests that special apprenticeship programmes designed for young people at risk can be effective. In the past many lower level apprenticeships (Level 2) were associated with lower quality and recent data confirm that in 2016/17 there were more people starting on higher-level apprenticeships while the uptake of Level 2 apprenticeships decreased (DfE, 2017). While an increase in higher-level apprenticeships can be seen as positive, it can leave aside some learners who are not be able to start immediately on a more demanding programme, as argued above. But an apprenticeship that leads to a lower level qualification can be a high-quality option, designed to provide strong support for the learner, with attention to a range of basic and transferable skills.

Policy issue 6.2: Supporting apprentices to successful completion

Challenge: Dropout

Apprentices with disadvantaged backgrounds are particularly at risk from dropout

Dropout from apprenticeship is a serious challenge in many countries. In England, two-thirds (67%) of starting apprentices complete (DfE SFA, 2017). In England, dropout can be less costly to the apprentice than in some other countries, because the apprenticeship is not tied to their employment. While methodological variations make it difficult to make precise comparisons of completion rates, completion rates are reported in the region of 50% for Australia, Canada, and New Zealand, above 60% for Ireland, over 70% in France but over 80% for Austria, Germany and Switzerland (OECD, 2014; Steedman, 2010 for Austria and France). Data from England show that apprentices from ethnic minorities, those with a learning difficulty or disability, and those with lower levels of education are all more likely to drop out (Gambin and Hogarth, 2016). In the Bern canton of Switzerland, around one-third of non-Swiss nationals drop out from apprenticeships, while among Swiss nationals, about one-fifth drop out. In Germany,

dropout rates among foreign-born apprentices were up to 50% higher than among German-born apprentices (Autorengruppe Bildungsberichterstattung, 2016).

Alongside familiar causes of dropout, apprentices may drop out when they get another job

A US survey reports personal issues as the most common cause of dropout from apprenticeship, closely followed by performance problems on the job or in the classroom, and getting another job (Lerman et al., 2009). Employers attribute much dropout to a lack of effort on the part of the apprentice (Stalder and Schmid, 2006). In England, dropout has been associated with getting another job, moving to another educational programme and dropping out of education and training altogether. Academic and pastoral support for apprentices was widely agreed to be an important factor in ensuring completion, particularly for those apprentices aged 16 to 17 (Gambin, et al., 2014). Chapter 3 has argued that those who supervise apprentices in the workplace need more effective preparation to support younger apprentices, and help them through to completion.

More demanding apprenticeships in England could cause higher dropout rates

In England, the development of new more demanding apprenticeship standards and assessments implies, other things being equal, that dropout and failure rates will rise, either because apprentices feel they will be unsuccessful in the final assessment and therefore abandon the programme, or because they do in fact fail. Although there has been a lot of discussion of demanding standards and assessments, there has been much less discussion of the other side of this coin, of how apprentices can be helped to meet those higher demands. Training providers will do their best to minimise dropout, but may also want to concentrate their attention on learners and programmes where success is easy, rather than on those individuals facing very stretching programmes, who need a lot of support to complete successfully. But it is exactly these individuals who will benefit most from the programme in terms of enhanced skills, qualifications and life chances.

Policy pointer 6.2: Supporting apprentices to successful completion

Consider establishing an apprenticeship support service. Through that service, offer targeted support to assist through to completion apprentices in need, or at risk. Such measures may include additional training in basic skills, mentoring and coaching, and other work-based measures.

Analysis: What works in ensuring successful completion

Targeted help for apprentices in difficulty is available in some countries

In academic education, there is a relatively well understood set of approaches designed to support those who struggle in the classroom. In strong school systems, those facing the greatest challenges receive extra coaching, formally or informally; mentoring is offered; wider personal or social problems affecting school performance are addressed (see for example Field, Kuczera and Pont, 2007). In some countries, apprentices may receive similar support when they face difficulties, designed to help them complete. This is often the responsibility of local authorities. For example, in Germany 'apprenticeship assistance', available to apprentice dropouts, supports transition into another apprenticeship or training programme. Assistance includes remedial education (language skills, theoretical and practical instruction) and support with homework and exams (see Box 6.2 for some further examples).

Employers may be more willing to take on apprentices at risk if they know that support is available

From an employer's point of view, taking on an apprentice with learning challenges will be a risk. But they may be more willing to take this risk if they know they will receive support during the apprenticeship to ensure completion. So one of the potential benefits of targeted support to apprentices at risk is not only that it will help completion, but also that it may help young people facing challenges to obtain a good quality apprenticeship in the first place.

Some studies suggest that support offered to apprentices can improve the chances of completion

Although evidence is patchy, studies suggest that support should help promote successful completion. An Australian study of apprenticeship completion found that many apprentices felt a lack of support and did not know who to contact for assistance, leading them to drop out (Snell and Hart, 2008). The interim evaluation of the Australian Apprenticeships Mentoring Package (Deloitte Access Economics, 2014) found that a credible party, independent of the employer and apprentice, can help address issues that may lead to dropout, such as problems in personal life, health issues and problems in the workplace.

Box 6.2. Support services for apprentices at risk

In Australia, the Apprenticeship Support Network aims to help employers to recruit, train and retain apprentices and apprentices to succeed. 11 regional networks provide advice and support services for employers and apprentices through: universal services for all employers and apprentices, essential administrative support, payment processing and regular contact; targeted services for employers and apprentices needing additional support to complete the apprenticeship. New targeted in-training support services, such as mentoring, will, where there is a risk of non-completion, help apprentices and employers to work through issues and difficulties; and assistance to individuals who may be unsuited to an apprenticeship to identify alternative training pathways. Australia, like England, has a competitive training market with providers competing for students. By establishing the Network the government aimed to create efficiencies and reduce confusion in the market through a one-stop-shop for employers. Services provided by the Network are funded by the Australian Government and delivered by private providers. While it is too early to evaluate this initiative, stakeholders involved note that in the market of third parties (such as Australian Apprenticeship Support Network providers) there is potential for them to 'trip over each other' and be destructively competitive.

In Austria, integrative VET programmes (Integrative Berufsausbildung, IBA) target young people with special needs (two-thirds of participants), disabled youth and those without a school-leaving certificate. Training assistants, typically with experience with disadvantaged youth, provide specialist support to the young people involved. When IBA takes place at a training company, training assistants oversee administrative tasks, define the content of the training contract between the apprentice and the training company, prepare company employees for the arrival of the apprentice, and register the apprentice at the vocational school. Training assistants also act as mediators, provide tutorial support and design the final exam for the partial qualification pathway. When IBA takes place at a supra-company training centre, training assistance is provided by the centre's social workers.

In Germany, apprenticeship assistance (Ausbildungsbegleitende Hilfen) is available to young people taking an apprenticeship, as well as those who dropout, and supports the transition into another apprenticeship (or training programme). Assistance includes remedial education (language skills, theoretical and practical instruction) and support with homework and exams, which helps to overcome learning difficulties. Socio-pedagogical assistance (including mentoring) is also available, and this includes support with everyday problems and mediation with the training company, school trainers and family. The service is provided according to a support plan developed in partnership with the young person concerned. It is delivered through individual assistance at least three hours per week; there are also small group sessions. One particular aim is to reach out to youth with learning difficulties and those disengaged from school.

In Switzerland, young people enrolled in two-year apprenticeships can receive individual coaching (Fachkundige individuelle Begleitung) designed to help them improve their academic, technical and social skills. Swiss cantons are responsible for implementation under a national framework and guidelines. Around half of the two-year apprentices take up this offer, mostly to tackle weak language skills, learning difficulties or psychological problems. Most coaches are former teachers (of vocational or special needs education), learning and speech therapists or social workers. They receive targeted training, which may vary across cantons. For example, in Zürich they must attend a 300-hour course and participate in regular team-coaching sessions. Apprentices may also attend remedial lessons at vocational schools. For example, in Vaud canton, apprentices may take time off during their work placement to attend school for remedial classes.

Source: Kis, V. (2016), "Work-based learning for youth at risk: Getting employers on board", *OECD Education Working Papers*, No. 150, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/5e122a91-en; and for Australia, Australian Apprenticeships (2017), "Australian Apprenticeship Support Network", www.australianapprenticeships.gov.au/australian-apprenticeship-support-network.

Dropout will be a key challenge of a reformed apprenticeship system in England

Dropout has received relatively little attention in the development of standards or in the operation of the levy. This is unfortunate, as if apprenticeship is to work as a vehicle for social mobility, young people, sometimes from highly disadvantaged backgrounds, are going to need a lot of support to assist them through to the successful completion of a demanding apprentice standard that will open the door to a successful career. Part of the answer to dropout lies in effective preparation of apprentices, and therefore in effective pre-apprenticeship and other forms of preparation, which provide relevant study skills to apprentices before they start their programmes, as discussed above. But, however well they are prepared, apprentices will face challenges during their training, and many will need active support of different types. The funding structure should encourage training providers to offer some support to apprentices. But training providers lack incentives to address several types of problem that may arise – for example when there are problems between the apprentice and the employer, or when the apprentice complains about poor quality training by the provider, or when the apprentice believes they should abandon their apprenticeship in favour of some other career or learning choice.

An independent apprenticeship support service, perhaps drawing on the Australian model, could be considered

England should consider establishing an independent apprenticeship support service to assist and support apprentices facing difficulties in completing their apprenticeship. While this is not designed to remove the responsibility from the training provider, and the employer, to do everything in their power to realise a successful completion, it recognises that apprentices may have needs that go beyond what employers and providers are in a position to offer, and beyond what they sometimes offer in practice. Such support might be provided at the request of the apprentice, but employers and training providers might also refer an apprentice in difficulty. An apprenticeship support service might also offer other services including services to employers, on the model of the Apprenticeship Support Network in Australia.

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