

Government apprenticeship schemes are 'fragile,' according to new research

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Apprenticeships remain a relatively fragile mode of vocational education, despite growing political interest internationally, according to new Oxford University research.

In the study, *People and Policy: A comparative study of apprenticeship*, researchers from Oxford University's Department of Education have for the first time reviewed apprenticeship participation on a global scale. Conducted in collaboration with the World Innovation Summit for Education (WISE), an initiative of Qatar Foundation, the research assesses apprenticeship frameworks in eight countries: Australia, Denmark, Egypt, England, Finland, Germany, India, and South Africa.

Apprenticeships play an important role in supporting young people to make the transition from school to working life and supporting adults in advancing their skills or acquiring new professions.

However, the findings suggest that reliance on the active participation of employers makes the apprenticeship model more vulnerable than classroom-based forms of learning, which can be delivered by state-sponsored colleges acting without direct employer support. For the model to work and produce successful, qualified apprentices, employer engagement is crucial, the authors suggest. Therefore, having strong incentives for employers to participate in programme provision is vital.

The study assesses participation levels by looking at the number of apprentices employed per 1,000 staff. This uptake ranges from 47 in

Denmark, which has the highest level of engagement, to five in South Africa, and as little as one in both Egypt and India. England and Germany have 32 and 31 apprentices per 1,000 staff respectively, while Australia has 22 and Finland 18.

Apprenticeship schemes vary widely across countries in all areas of management, from how they are organised and financed, to the day to day running and learning style of the programmes offered. In some countries, apprenticeships have come to be used as a route for giving less academically minded young people a second chance in life, which the authors find to be increasingly unrealistic.

The varying degrees of international participation suggest that there is still a grey area in some countries around how to make the most of the apprenticeship model. Apprenticeship incentives are more appreciated in regions where employer associations are historically stronger, for example in Denmark and Germany.

For employers in some countries, such as Egypt, apprenticeships are seen to have as many disincentives as they do incentives. A big concern is around employee retention: why invest in someone when they might leave and go elsewhere?

In other countries, including England and Australia, a policy discourse has developed where the apprenticeship has come to be perceived as a form of 'magic dust', which can be sprinkled on almost any vocational [education](#) and training problem, and offered to any young person who wants one.

Dr. Maia Chankseliani, Associate Professor of Comparative and International Education at Oxford University and co-author of the Oxford/WISE report, said: 'The policy purpose of apprenticeships is not always clear. There are economic and social purposes of apprenticeship

and there is a potential for tension among policy-makers between wanting apprenticeship to be viewed by employers and wider society as a rigorous, high status route, and also wanting to use it to support social inclusion for those who have not thrived on the academic route and within mainstream schooling. This tension about apprenticeship purpose can be problematic because it may impede the formation of realistic expectations about apprenticeship system.'

In Finland, apprenticeships have been assigned a niche role focused largely on second chance, social inclusion objectives, with little attempt to see it as a broader, high quality route for large volumes of initial [vocational education](#) and training (V.E.T). In the UK, by contrast, there has been a tendency to try to pursue social inclusion and high status objectives simultaneously, with the overall result that to some extent neither outcome has been realised.

When the New Labour governments in the UK expanded apprenticeship provision, it was positioned as a relatively high status option for those seeking intermediate and technician level training and offered with an "apprenticeship guarantee". This guarantee proved impossible to deliver, as the volume of apprenticeship places was (and still is) determined by the willingness of employers to provide them, rather than by individual demand from [young people](#), and the guarantee was quietly abandoned.

In order to improve apprenticeship engagement in countries where the model has been less successful, the authors suggest that it is in the government's interest to work with industry to better incentivise this investment and make the benefits of the approach more explicit.

Dr. Asmaa Alfadala, Director of Research and Content Development, World Innovation Summit for Education (WISE), remarked: 'WISE is very pleased to collaborate with our Oxford colleagues on this important topic, as part of an ongoing series of WISE reports on key global

education challenges. This research report provides useful portraits of diverse approaches to apprenticeships, intended to guide policy-makers and suggest what could be achieved with more integration and cooperation among stakeholders around this unique and practical education tool.'

Dr. Maia Chankseliani will participate in the upcoming World Innovation Summit for Education that takes place in Doha, Qatar 14-16 November, 2017.

More information: 'People and Policy: A comparative study of apprenticeship' [www.wise-qatar.org/2017-wise-r ... olicy-apprenticeship](http://www.wise-qatar.org/2017-wise-r...olicy-apprenticeship)

Provided by University of Oxford

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