



Traineeships in England: Lessons from the Past and Perspectives for the Future

Research Report

August 2024

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Executive Summary

This research report examines the historical trajectory of traineeship programs in England and provides targeted recommendations to design and deliver high-quality traineeship programmes nationwide. For the purpose of this report, traineeships are defined as pre-apprenticeship initiatives primarily targeted at young people aged 16-19, aiming to facilitate the progression of participants into apprenticeships or employment by offering a blend of vocational training and hands-on experience. Across Europe, traineeships are primarily designed for socially or economically disadvantaged youth, including those who are early school leavers, unemployed and/or from minority backgrounds. While some programs abroad are explicitly labelled as pre-apprenticeships or traineeships, others operate under different brand names but share the same objective to efficiently integrate young people into the world of work. In light of the renewed interest in traineeships in England as means to address broader skills deficits and youth unemployment, this report provides recommendations drawn from England's past experience, as well as from comparable programs in Scotland and Switzerland.

Key Recommendations

Stakeholder-Friendly Policy

- **Consultation and Collaboration:** Engage with business, industry, education stakeholders, the DWP, and the DBT to ensure traineeships meet labour market needs and address economic impacts of NEETs. Ensure employers help shape the traineeship curricula to align with apprenticeship entry standards.

Quality Over Quantity

- **Setting Realistic Targets:** Trends over the past years show that young people in full-time education have increased at the expense of those in traineeships. Prioritize meaningful training and successful outcomes over participation rates. Focus on providing opportunities for socially and economically disadvantaged young people.

Support for Trainees and Employers

- **Preparation and Monitoring:** Enhance trainees' basic skills and employability before starting traineeships. Match trainees with placements based on their needs and skills for better outcomes. Ensure providers support both trainees and employers throughout the traineeship.

Attracting Young People

- **Increased Awareness:** Promote traineeships through career guidance, online platforms, social media, and success stories. Market traineeships as a valuable employment route, involving youth organizations and local government.

Apprenticeship Reform

- **Focus on 18-24 Year-Olds:** Traineeships would be ineffective in the long-run unless they can be established as secure pathways to apprenticeships or employment.

I. Introduction

Skills deficits represent a growing, critical challenge to the UK labour market. According to the Business Barometer 2024 report, published by The Open University (2024) in partnership with the British Chambers of Commerce, 62% of surveyed UK organisations are currently experiencing skills deficits. In 2022, the UK faced a staggering 531,200 skill-shortage vacancies (DfE, 2023b), more than double the 226,500 recorded in 2017.

A robust Vocational Education and Training (VET) system has been widely recognized and promoted as a key mechanism to ensure the integration of young people into the world of work (OECD & ILO, 2014). In this context, the lack of young people enrolled in apprenticeships in England is cause for concern – in 2023/24 more than half of all apprenticeship participants were over the age of 25 (DfE, 2024). Unlike many other advanced economies, apprenticeships in England are not primarily used as a pathway from school to employment for young people, but as up-skilling and reskilling opportunities for older individuals (McNally, 2018).

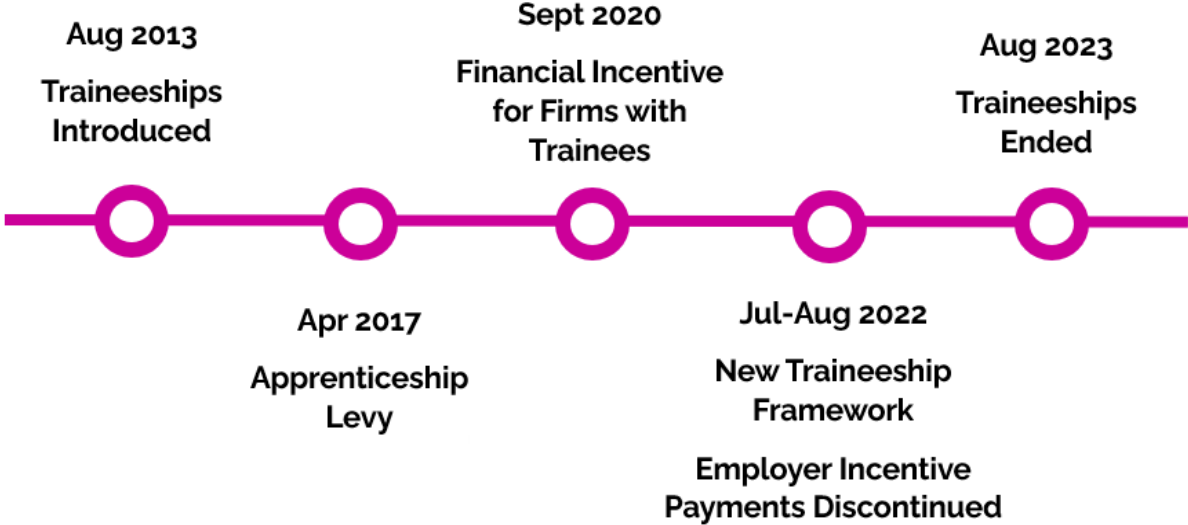
Therefore, traineeships, as transition mechanisms from school to apprenticeships, can be an effective strategy to not only improve youth labour market outcomes but to also address the skills deficits the UK economy is currently facing. However, despite the widespread impact of these shortages, a majority of employers do not have specific training, recruitment and retention initiatives for targeted groups such as people with disabilities or younger workers (The Open University, 2024). These skills deficits are accompanied by a substantial number of unemployed young people – 378,000 people aged 16 to 24 were not in education, employment or training (NEET) in March to May 2024, an increase of 49,000 from the previous year (ONS, 2024). These statistics underscore the pressing need for effective strategies to bridge the skills gap and equip the workforce with the competencies required by the industries facing the highest shortages – namely, Construction, Manufacturing and Information and Communications (DfE, 2023).

Traineeships are not a novel strategy for England and were first introduced in 2013. Designed as a gateway to apprenticeships, they offered a combination of work preparation and basic skills training to young people, primarily aged 16 to 19. The goal was clear: to support a significant number of young people into apprenticeships and other employment opportunities through a well-rounded training program. However, despite the government's ambitious targets, traineeships failed to attract a sufficient number of both employers and young participants, which ultimately led to their suppression in 2022.

Fast forward to 2024, and the conversation around traineeships is once again gaining momentum, particularly under the proposed policies of the newly elected Labour government. Labour has signalled a commitment to reintroducing pre-apprenticeship schemes, recognizing their potential to address skill shortages and enhance youth employment. Labour's proposed 'Growth and Skills Levy' aims to provide a more flexible training alternative, allowing employers to allocate up to 50% of their levy funds to non-apprenticeship forms of training (Farquharson et al., 2024). In light of the renewed political interest in traineeships, this report aims to identify the key challenges for pre-apprenticeship programs and provide targeted recommendations to ensure their successful creation and implementation in England. The following chapter will trace the rise and fall of traineeships in England, while highlighting the shortcomings of the program and the important contextual factors shaping the vocational and educational landscape in England. The third chapter analyses similar pre-apprenticeship programs introduced in Scotland and Switzerland, in order to provide a comparative understanding of the nature of traineeships and the crucial mechanisms to ensure successful outcomes. Lastly, based on the preceding analyses, the final chapter of the report provides targeted recommendations for policymakers to ensure traineeships can not only efficiently mitigate current skill shortages but also build a more resilient and capable workforce for the future.

II. History of Traineeships in England

1. The Rise and Decline of Traineeships



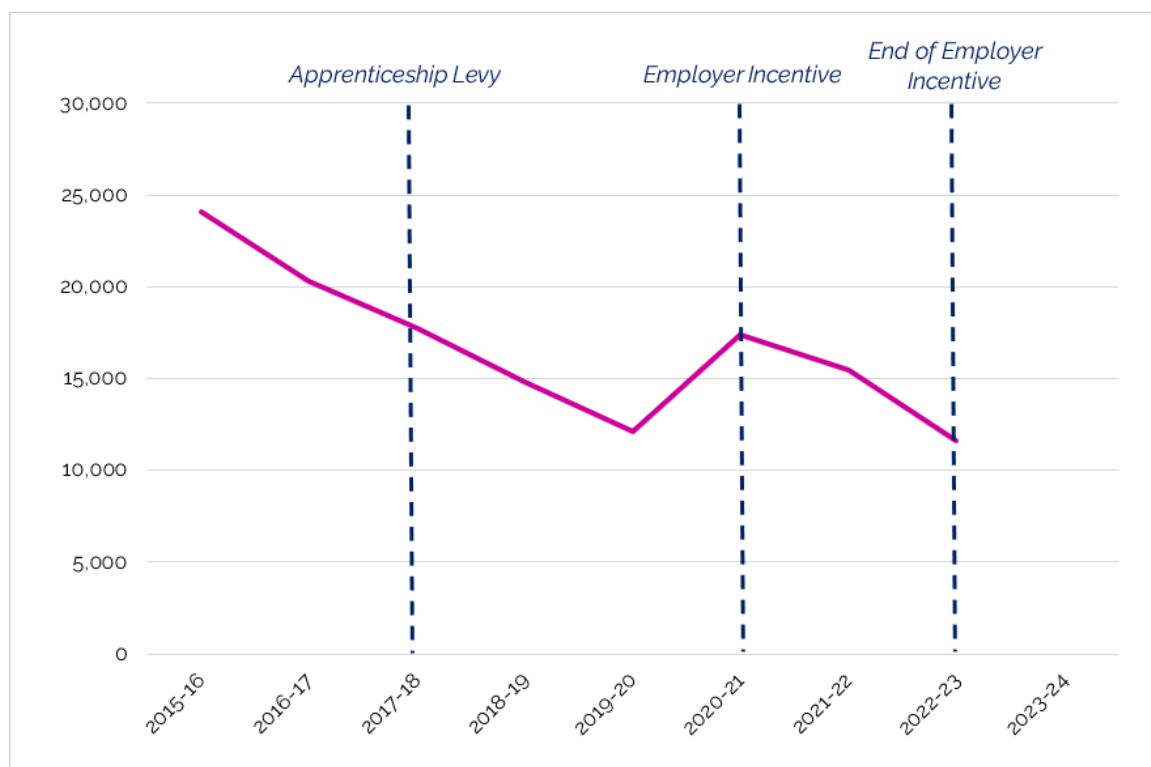
Source: The National Archives

Traineeships were introduced in England in 2013 during a period of significant educational reform following the formation of a new Conservative-led coalition government. The policy environment at the time of their introduction was focussed upon Raising Participation Age (RPA) and reducing the number of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET), a predominant theme of the 2011 Education Act, in which the age of participation in training or education was raised from 16 to 18 (Mirza-Davies, 2015). Traineeships emerged as a response to a renewed emphasis on vocational education and the programme began amidst a high point in apprenticeship engagement, as the number of people starting apprenticeships peaked at 521,000 in 2011-12, immediately before the launch of traineeships (Powell, 2024). The aim of traineeships was to offer a combination of 'substantial work placements, work skills training, English and maths, in order to support a significant number of young people into apprenticeships and other employment opportunities', predominantly for those between 16 and 19, although extending to 25 in some circumstances (DFE, 2013, p.3). Despite the apparent triumphs of vocational training at the time, traineeships consistently failed to meet up-take targets and attract young people.

Figure 1 clearly demonstrates the steady decline in those starting traineeships from 2015 until the abandonment of the policy due to low levels of youth engagement in 2023. The graph also shows the effects of key policy changes throughout the policy's duration. For example, a sharp decline in 2017 until the programme reaches a low of only 12,120 starts in 2019 is arguably a result of the implementation of the 2017 Apprenticeship Levy. The Levy has been criticised for its redirection of financial resources and employers' attention towards apprenticeships at the expense of other training programmes, such as traineeships. The number of employers offering alternative training programmes to apprenticeships fell, as well as the perception of traineeships by employers given the unequal government attention on apprenticeships over other forms of training (Powell & Foley, 2020; National Audit Office, 2020, p.30). Furthermore, the spike in

traineeship starts in 2020-21 correlates with updates to the programme in the same year. These changes included extending the duration of traineeships, widening participation to those with level 3 qualifications and offering digital skills as an option. Perhaps most significantly, the update also provided incentive payments to employers of £1,000 per trainee (DFE, 2022). The importance of the payments to employers is reinforced by the sharpening decline of traineeship starts again in 2022, when the government withdrew the measure (DFE, 2023a). The response of traineeship starts to these policy changes highlights the crucial role of government investment and employers' engagement in the policy, which have a clear impact on the success or failure of traineeships.

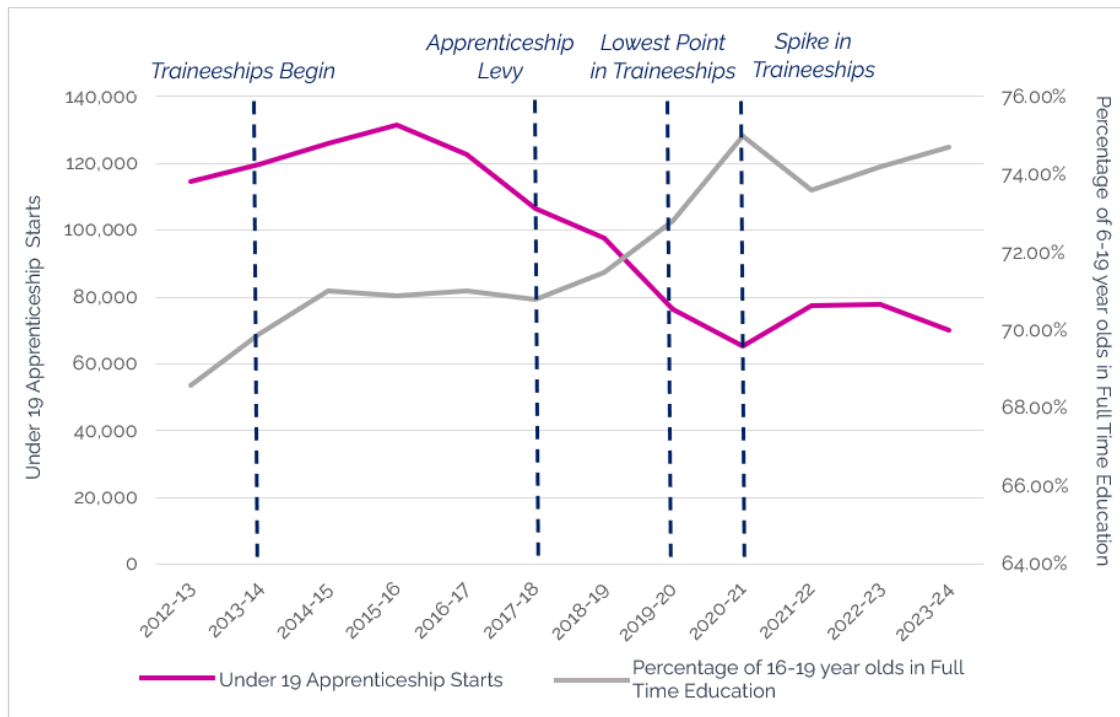
Figure 1 - Traineeship Starts in England from 2015 to 2023



Source: UK Government, 2023.

However, throughout the programme's duration, traineeships have proven mostly successful in achieving their goals of supporting many young people into apprenticeships. According to a study published by the Department for Education, within 12 months of completing a traineeship, 29% of the first cohort of trainees between 16 to 23 years old began an apprenticeship and 57% started further learning within this time frame (Dorsett et al., 2019). Moreover, the decline in traineeships mirrors that of apprenticeships, albeit on a smaller scale, and takes place alongside an increase in the number of 16-18 year-olds in full time education (see figure 2).

Figure 2 – Under 19 Apprenticeship Starts and the Percentage of 16-19 year olds in Full Time Education in England from 2012 to 2023



Source: Powell, 2024; DFE, 2024; DFE, 2019; IBISWorld, 2023.

This suggests that the increasingly low uptake of traineeships is not necessarily a reflection of their weakness. Rather, the low engagement with traineeships is part of a larger trend away from vocational training and towards full-time education for young people. This conclusion is drawn from the data and patterns apparent in the graphs, which demonstrate a fall in traineeships and apprenticeships (vocational training) and a rise in full time education. Though statistically these forms of vocational training are declining, this does not necessarily reflect educational policy trends. This may be caused to some extent by RPA, although the launch of traineeships and implementation of RPA both in 2013 means it is difficult to distinguish between effects of RPA or flaws of traineeships themselves on low up-take. Given the positive outcomes of the policy for trainees themselves and in a reduction of NEET, it is important to identify reasons for consistently low participation beyond these trends to ensure that future implementation is more successful.

2. Future Challenges

The background of the traineeships programme reveals several challenges to identify the origins of the low participation but also to enquire about its effectiveness in addressing the skills gap and unemployment problems.

As mentioned, even with the incentives provided to employers from 2020-2022 to incorporate trainees, non-apprentice training remained relatively unpopular. On one hand, the restriction for employers to dedicate the levy to non-apprenticeship training is seen as a discouragement. On the other hand, traineeships might not have a significantly positive impact on all groups of youth: "For 19-23 year-olds, Traineeships had a positive

impact on being in employment 12 months later [53%]. However, there was no significant impact for 16-18 year-olds [19%]" (Dorsett et al., 2019, p. 55). In that tone, a study from The Centre for Vocational Education Research (CVER) observes the underrepresentation of disadvantaged young people in apprenticeships. The increase in high-level apprenticeships from people above 25 years old during the decrease in overall starts, shows the structural inaccessibility of apprenticeships for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds (Cavaglia et al., 2022, p. 2). It has also been registered that two-thirds of apprentices are recruited from existing employees (Newton et al., 2017, p. 8). In a context of vulnerability, the undertaking of non-paid traineeships might expose youth to cheap labour exploitation (Everett, 2012). Such observations suggest that the apprenticeship levy has been disharmonised with the goals of the traineeship programme. Attention also needs to be drawn to the rates of desertion: while the average is around 5 percentage points (Dorsett et al., 2019, p. 57), the disaggregated data show that the youngest group from 16-18 years old have a significant drop-out average of 7 percentage points.

So far, the new Labour government proposed a short-term decision to address the skills gap and the decline of apprenticeships by allowing companies to dedicate 50% of the levy to non-apprenticeship training. Non-apprentices would get a wider range of training and young people better skills-building opportunities (Davies, 2024). While this helps the coherence of the apprenticeship levy with the traineeship goals, there is a need to further enquire about the quality of the traineeships and the focus of the apprenticeships for younger groups. Comparing cases of traineeship programmes in other countries will better inform the reflection on how to properly address the skills gap and unemployment in the UK while taking care of the underrepresentation of disadvantaged people in apprenticeships and ensuring a positive impact of traineeships on behalf of youth's job security.

III. Traineeships – Comparative Perspective

1. Scotland

1.1 Certificates of Work Readiness and Pre-Apprenticeships

It is instructive to consider the Scottish experience with pre-apprenticeship programmes considering that while distinct, Scotland and England share certain institutional and cultural similarities, and approaches to youth not in employment, education or training (McPherson, 2021, 136). Scotland's equivalent to England's apprenticeships is called *modern* apprenticeships. Two programmes were created in the past decade and a half to facilitate entry into these modern apprenticeships: *foundation* apprenticeships (FA), designed for those in their final years of secondary education, and the Certificate of Work Readiness (CWR) programme, targeted specifically to those who have few or no academic qualifications. As they offer simultaneous training and long-term work experience, these certificates are the most akin to the now defunct traineeship programme in England, and will thus be the focus of this comparative analysis. The Edge Foundation has previously written about foundation apprenticeships (Newton et al, 2018).

Certificates of Work Readiness provide participants with work experience of a minimum of 190 hours over at least a 10-week period. Colleges and training providers partner with employers to provide the qualification. The programme is targeted at young people aged 16-19 aiming to enter the workforce, who would have otherwise done so without recognised qualifications (Skills Development Scotland, 2017). It is worth noting here that in 2020, 8.6% of Scots aged 16-19 were classified as NEET, and would constitute a target group for this

programme (McPherson, 2021, 136). As with traineeships, participants earn a recognised qualification as they benefit from work experience in an actual business (Scottish Government, 2022). The stated goal of the programme is to prepare participants for employment or a modern apprenticeship (Skills Development Scotland, 2017). Constructed in this way, the CWR forms part of Scotland's Employability Pipeline (Employability in Scotland, n.d.).

1.2 Lessons to Learn from Scotland's Certificates of Work Readiness

The relevant actors within the Scottish government crafted the CWR programme in consultation with business and industry, and certainly in response to the needs of these to have work-ready individuals for entry level jobs (Skills Development Scotland, 2017; Skills Development Scotland, n.d.-a). A comparison of the implementation and user-friendliness of CWR and FA illustrates the struggles the Scottish government has had with provisioning pre-apprenticeship programmes.

| | CWR | FA |
|--------------------------|--|--|
| Implementation | Administered by local colleges. | Administered by schools. FAs are often deprioritised in favour of school subjects and there is confusion over participation requirements. This has led to negative impacts on retention and recruitment (Education Scotland, 2022) |
| User-friendliness | No centralised system for finding work and training opportunities ¹ | Dedicated section for FAs on Scotland's apprenticeship website (Skills Development Scotland, n.d.-b) |

Scotland's pre-apprenticeship programmes are thus poorly understood and integrated into the education and training framework, and the lack of a centralised system for finding opportunities poses a barrier to CWR participation specifically. One would be remiss not to mention that there are other pre-apprenticeship programmes in Scotland separate from CWR and FAs.² Paired with the comparison between the implementation and user-friendliness of CWR and FA programmes, this suggests that Scotland's pre-apprenticeship system is not user-friendly and is not particularly cohesive.

Scotland's publicly available monitoring and evaluation of CWR is lacking.³ In what was meant to be a comprehensive assessment of the Scottish government's efforts to provide employability skills to youth, no references to CWR were made and no data was provided. Indeed, the 2023 report on the impact of the Development of Youth Workforce Strategy omitted any discussion of CWR, though it did include statistics on

¹ From researcher observation.

² Some are offered by specific companies, such as Scottish Power, or industry groups, such as for electricians, and many fall outside the umbrella of CWR (Scottish Power, n.d.; Scotland's Electrical Trade Association, n.d.; Ringlink Scotland, n.d.).

³ The dedicated email for the CWR programme, cwr@sds.co.uk is no longer in use; when reached for data regarding the number of participants in the CWR programme and their destinations, the corporate affairs department of Skills Development Scotland (corporate.affairs@sds.co.uk) did not provide an answer prior to the completion of this report.

work experience placements for *school students* (Scottish Government, 2023). However, there is one report, no longer accessible,⁴ which concluded that most participants in CWR had a positive experience with the programme and went on to positive employment or education outcomes (Wiseman, Roe and Parry, 2018, 23). In the absence of data from CWR, it is instructive to consider data from FAs, the next best programme approximating traineeships in England.

Enrolment in FAs & Achievement (Skills Development Scotland, 2023, 15; 23-24)

Figure 7A: No. of FA enrolments by school year group at SCQF Level 6

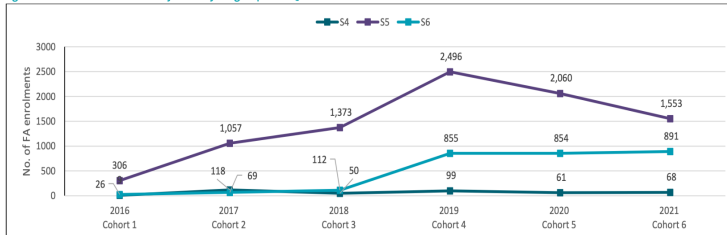
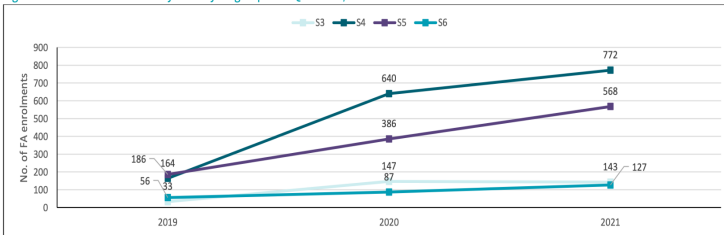
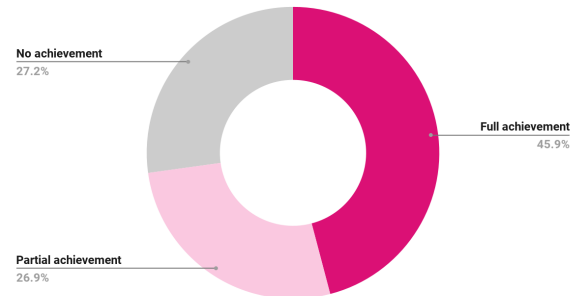


Figure 7B: No. of FA enrolments by school year group at SCQF Level 4/5



FA Achievement 2016-2021



The middling achievement levels and declining enrolment can plausibly be linked to the difficulties the Scottish government has had in implementing the FA programme in its schools. Among those who completed a foundation apprenticeship between 2016 and 2021, 37% went on to pursue a university education, 22% went to a local college, and 11% remained in school. A significant proportion (**21%**) of those who completed FAs went on to modern apprenticeships or employment, demonstrating a link between FA completion and entry into MAs and the labour force (Skills Development Scotland, 2023, 25).

The UK government can glean several lessons from the Scottish experience on Certificates of Work Readiness as it crafts a new framework for traineeships:

1. The process should be done in consultation with, and buy-in from stakeholders in business, industry and education.
2. Traineeship opportunities should be easily accessible and understandable to its intended users. They should also be promoted to that audience.

2. Switzerland

2.1 Vocational Education in Switzerland

Looking at Switzerland's model is crucial because their system of traineeship and apprenticeship is well integrated into the mainstream educational system. A large proportion of individuals choose to opt for Switzerland's Vocational Education and Training program instead of opting for other educational and training

⁴ Attempting to access an evaluation of the programme by McTier, Clelland and McGregor (http://www.skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk/media/816523/cwr_final_report_with_cover__7_jan_.pdf) yields a Error 404 or empty file message.

paths. It therefore becomes important to understand why and how Switzerland has integrated the system of traineeships in an efficient manner in order to address the demands of the labour market. Such a case study can lend valuable insights on how the UK can enhance its existing traineeship and apprenticeship programs. Switzerland's Vocational and Professional Education and Training (VET/PET) system is central to the country's educational framework. Their system follows a dual-track approach wherein academic learning is integrated with practical work experience. Students can divide their time between part-time studies at vocational schools and apprenticeships at host companies. This model aims at ensuring a holistic educational experience that equips students with both theoretical knowledge and practical skills and it is particularly notable for its effectiveness and widespread acceptance, with over half of the Swiss population aged 25-64 holding a VET or PET qualification as their highest level of education (Hoeckel, Field, et al. 2009).

The dual-track approach in Switzerland is employer-driven, with significant contributions from the Confederation, cantons, and professional organisations, including employers, trade associations, and trade unions. These stakeholders are actively involved in designing the curriculum, providing apprenticeship placements, and ensuring the quality of training provided. This collaborative effort ensures that the VET/PET system remains closely aligned with the needs of the labour market, thereby enhancing the employability of its graduates. For instance, surveys indicate that two-thirds of companies offering training reap net benefits from the productive output of apprentices during their training period (Hoeckel, Field, et al. 2009). This system also facilitates the transition from education to employment, with apprentices more likely to secure jobs in their field of study upon completion, compared to graduates of exclusively school-based systems. Furthermore, the structure of the Swiss VET/PET system is flexible and offers multiple options to its students. Two-year VET programmes lead to a Federal VET Certificate, while three to four-year programmes culminate in a Federal VET Diploma. In 2023, almost 90% of the diplomas were federal VET diplomas whilst the Federal VET certificates accounted for roughly 10% of the diplomas (Federal Statistical Office).

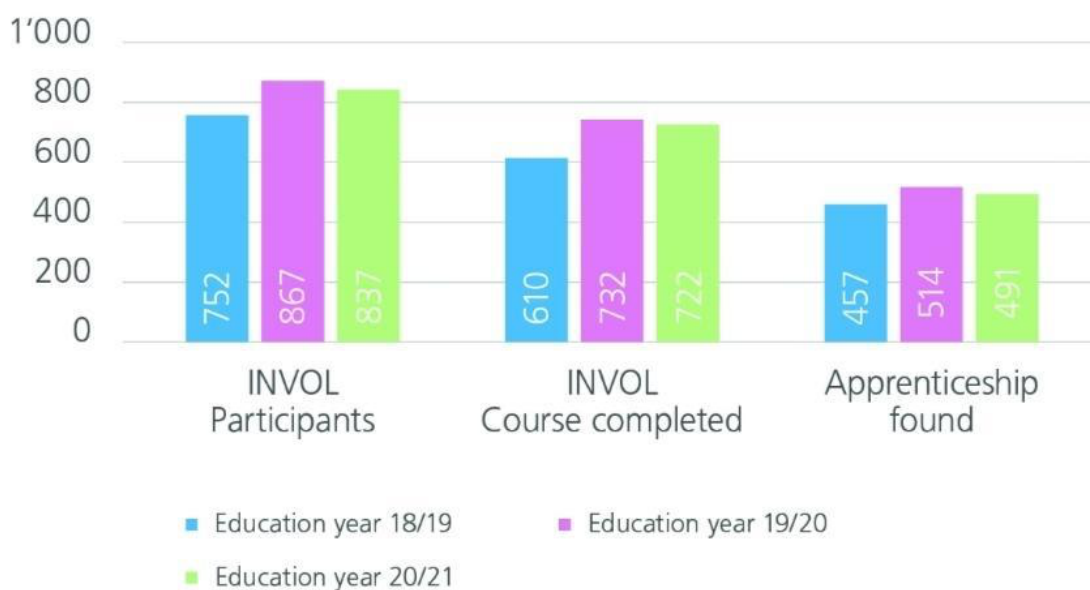
Students who wish to pursue higher education can also opt for the Federal Vocational Baccalaureate (FVB), which opens doors to Swiss universities of applied sciences and, with additional qualifications, to traditional universities. According to the State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation, the proportion of students obtaining the FVB has been steadily increasing since its introduction in 1994, reflecting its growing importance within the Swiss educational landscape (State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation). Additionally, the 2009 report published by the OECD has noted that one of the key strengths of the VET/PET system is the fact that it is market-driven (Hoeckel, Field, et al. 2009). This means that the availability of apprenticeship placements is determined by employer demand, while students' choices are balanced against these opportunities. This ensures that the training provided is relevant and responsive to the needs of the economy. Furthermore, national VET ordinances help maintain coherence between the work-based and school-based components, ensuring that apprentices receive a well-rounded education that is not overly narrow or company-specific.

2.2 INVOL- Integration Pre-Apprenticeships

The Integration Pre-Apprenticeship program, initiated in Switzerland in 2018, is a targeted effort to support young refugees and temporarily admitted individuals. The initiative aims to equip participants with essential skills and work experience which would facilitate their transition into the vocational education and training (VET) system, particularly in sectors experiencing skill shortages.

The primary aim of this program is to equip the individuals with some skills that would be transferable in the workplace. In its pilot phase, 750 individuals enrolled, with 610 successfully completing the first year of training. According to the Learning and Work Institute (n.d.), around 75% of these participants secured professional apprenticeships linked to national qualifications, while an additional 5% found employment. Collaboration is an essential feature of the program wherein cantons, professional organizations, and vocational training institutions work together to design the curriculum. This cooperative approach ensures that the curriculum aligns with labour market needs which would enhance the relevance of the training provided. Furthermore, the program focuses on developing a range of competencies, including language proficiency, basic literacy and numeracy, cultural understanding, and transversal skills. During the program, participants engage in a one-year training program that includes full-time attendance, with two days dedicated to classroom-based learning and three days to work-based learning in participating businesses (Learning and Work Institute. n.d.).

participants, course completed, apprenticeships



Source: State Secretariat for Migration SEM.

Additionally, since its launch more than 2400 people have participated in the pilot programme and according to the State Secretariat for Migration, a significantly high number of participants tend to complete the courses and at least two-thirds of them are able to secure an apprenticeship upon course completion.

2.3 Lessons to Learn from Switzerland's Model

In light of the Swiss apprenticeship model, there are several key recommendations that the UK could consider enhancing its own apprenticeship and traineeship systems, particularly in the context of the recent Labour Party electoral victory. Firstly, the UK should consider investing in sectors that specifically have a high demand for skilled workers. While demand for skilled labour can fluctuate, sectors like medicine, banking and technology are in short supply of skilled labour (Richard Davies, 2024). It is also important to understand the changing landscape of relevant professional skills especially in the current context where AI is being

increasingly used across various academic and professional sectors. In Switzerland, professional organisations play a central role in designing curricula, providing apprenticeship placements, and ensuring that the training meets industry standards. The UK could benefit from legally mandating the involvement of industry stakeholders in the development and oversight of apprenticeship standards, similar to the Swiss model. This would help ensure that the training provided is closely aligned with the needs of the labour market, thereby enhancing the employability of apprentices upon completion of their training.

Secondly, modifying and applying the dual-track system in the UK could provide students with a more comprehensive educational experience. In Switzerland, the dual-track approach effectively balances academic learning with practical work experience, providing students with a well-rounded education that prepares them for the demands of the workforce. The UK could seek to expand partnerships between vocational schools and employers, ensuring that apprentices receive both classroom-based learning and hands-on training in a real-world setting. This could not only improve the quality of apprenticeships but also enhance students' transition from education to employment. However, it would also be important to ensure that the apprenticeship programmes effectively compensate the participants given how central the issue of cost of living was in the recent UK elections.

Finally, promoting flexibility and lifelong learning within the apprenticeship system is essential for ensuring that individuals can adapt to changing labour market conditions. In Switzerland, the VET/PET system offers multiple pathways for students to continue their education and upgrade their skills throughout their careers. The UK should consider introducing similar flexibility within its apprenticeship system, providing opportunities for apprentices to pursue further education and training, and encouraging lifelong learning as a means of enhancing employability and career development.

IV. Recommendations and Final Remarks

• Designing a Stakeholder-Friendly Policy

Consultation: Establish a consultation period with stakeholders in business, industry, and education to gauge interest and ensure alignment with the current labour market needs.

Cross-sectoral Collaboration: Youth unemployment and skills deficits have broad implications for the labour market and the economy as a whole. Estimates indicate that the potential income loss for NEETs in OECD economies amounts to approximately USD 560 billion, even when considering their potentially lower earning capacity (Kis, 2016). As such, the DfE should actively collaborate with the *Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)*, as well as with the *Department for Business and Trade (DBT)*, in the creation, implementation and promotion of traineeships.

Employer-Driven Programme: A successful traineeship programme would favour the *input of employers in the curricula* to ensure they meet the standards for entry into the apprenticeships. It would also provide sufficient flexibility and be *receptive to employer feedback*, as well as the evolving needs of the labour market.

• Quality Over Quantity

Setting Realistic Expectations: Trends over the past years show that young people in full-time education have increased at the expense of those in traineeships. Therefore, targets and expectations need to be adjusted accordingly, prioritizing meaningful, high-quality training over quantity.

Measuring Success: The focus needs to be shifted from the volume of starts to the quality of traineeships. The measure of success of programs should be the completion rate and the long-term effects of traineeships rather than the number of participants.

Targeting Disadvantaged Youth: Work-based education is particularly beneficial for *youth at risk* (Kis, 2016). Traineeship programmes should target and prioritize young people in socially and economically disadvantaged areas, where paths to apprenticeships or employment are scarce.

• Active Support for Trainees and Employers

Preparatory Activities: It is essential to provide preparatory activities to develop trainees' employability. Young people who are NEET often have lower levels of basic skills training and therefore need to be efficiently prepared before taking on a traineeship (Learning and Work Institute, 2019). This would not only *boost young people's skills and confidence*, but also *improve the cost-benefit balance for employers*, as they will receive better prepared trainees (Kis, 2016).

Tailored Placements: Work placements have to be tailored to the individual needs and capabilities of trainees. The matching process between trainees and employers needs to be rigorous, relying on *assessment of trainees and consultations* to increase the likelihood of successful program completion and improve long-term outcomes.

Framework for Quality: Develop a clear framework for quality assurance, requiring providers to maintain strong oversight to ensure participants experience high-quality work placements. Providers should be ensuring hands-on support for both trainees and employers.

- **Attracting Young People**

Fair Compensation: In light of the cost of living crisis the UK is currently experiencing, making traineeships attractive to young people who are NEET means providing a minimal financial incentive, especially for traineeships of longer duration. As employers should not be expected to shoulder the full cost of traineeships, the government could subsidize a certain amount of positions. *Budget constraints are a significant concern*, however, conceiving traineeships as a collective effort between the DeF, DWT and DBT could help allocate more funds towards the program.

Increased Awareness: Awareness about traineeships can be increased through efficient career guidance in schools and improved access to information online and on social media. Promoting “success stories” can highlight the benefits and opportunities traineeships provide.

Clear Messaging: Traineeships need to be positioned as an *attractive route to employment*. The outreach process should further *include civil society, local government and youth organisations* who have access to young people who are NEET.

- **Comprehensive Educational Reform**

Focusing Apprenticeships on 18-24 Year Olds: Traineeships would be ineffective in the long run unless they can be established as secure pathways to apprenticeships or employment. Therefore, the current inaccessibility of apprenticeships needs to change. Shifting government funding away from experienced employees over the age of 25 who are enrolled in apprenticeships by way of upskilling, can help refocus the programs on young people.

Gradual Shift Towards a Dual-Track System: As a long-term goal, the government should continue to reform secondary education to include a dual-track system that allows students to gain work experience while completing their academic learning. OECD countries with a robust VET system, such as Germany and Austria, boast lower rates of NEET youth (OECD, 2022).

Final Remarks

In summary, traineeships should not be solely conceived as an educational initiative, but as a broader integration and labour market policy which can contribute to social cohesion and address the skills deficits the economy is experiencing. This strategic framing of traineeships could help create a co-ownership of the policy by different stakeholders, including, inter alia, the DfE, DWP and DBT, as well as potential civil and youth organisations targeting disadvantaged youth. Nonetheless, the design of effective traineeships would require a detailed consultation process, employer buy-in and sufficient government investment. As such, launching the traineeships should be first done on a smaller scale within the constraints of the existing Apprenticeship Levy. The first phase of the new Traineeship program should clearly prioritize quality over quantity, and target subgroups who stand to gain the most. When the program is ready to be up-scaled, further research should look at potential funding avenues beyond the Apprenticeship Levy from a wider range of government departments.

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