



# Guiding Note on Informal Apprenticeship: Organise without formalising

Implementing Agency





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**Author:**

**Patrick Werquin (Patrick Werquin Consulting)**

**Publisher:**

VET Toolbox Coordination Hub | c/o Belgian Development Agency Enabel  
Rue Haute, 147 - 1000 Brussels - Belgium  
Tel: +32 2 505 37 00 | Email: [info@vettoolbox.eu](mailto:info@vettoolbox.eu) | [www.vettoolbox.eu](http://www.vettoolbox.eu)

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## PROLOGUE

“Informal apprenticeship refers to the system by which a young apprentice acquires the skills for a trade or craft, in a micro or small enterprise, learning and working side by side with an experienced practitioner”.

Informal apprenticeship is no longer seen as a primitive practice or a form of exploitation of young people, but as the training system of the informal economy, which has evolved from traditional learning based on the immediate and extended family and has the potential to develop.

Informal apprenticeship systems are an integral part of a society’s institutions, whether formal or informal. As advanced countries have shown, a successful transition to modern learning systems is possible; a gradual improvement of an indigenous training system is possible. This requires raising the level of competences, improving the capacity of master craftspersons to innovate and diversify, and encouraging enterprises to learn the latest knowledge and adopt new technologies.

A better system will improve the employability of apprentices coming out of the informal apprenticeship system; they could have a decent job with a decent income.

Incentives can be provided to encourage the transition of enterprises from the informal to the formal economy, for example, by registering them as apprenticeship training providers, thereby opening up access to further training.

Supported by the European Commission/LuxDev VET-Toolbox, this Guiding Note on Informal Apprenticeship by Mr. Werquin should be seen as an essential first step on the understanding of (informal) apprenticeship, accompanied by the ILO/CINTERFOR Quality Apprenticeship Toolbox (translated into French by the EC/LuxDev VET Toolbox). These documents are in line with the two recent ILO publications on Quality Apprenticeship.

I thank the VET Toolbox participants for their responses to the questionnaires - feedback from countries like Palestine (ENABEL), Pakistan (BC) - and my colleagues at LuxDev for Burkina Faso and Niger.

In the same way, we must illustrate the titanic work already done by the International Labour Office on the subject, among others by Mrs Hofmann, on the upgrade of informal apprenticeship in Africa.

Other work by the AFD and GIZ has completed this good work.

Alexis Hoyaux

ETFP Expert LuxDev

LuxDev liaison officer for the VET Toolbox

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## SUMMARY

The aim of this Guiding Note is to identify structuring elements for an analysis of informal apprenticeship and the possibilities for improving its relevance, performance and thus quality. To this end, the analysis focuses on two of the main dimensions to be described and analysed: the creation and recognition of competences, in the context of informal apprenticeship, i.e., in the workplace with employers in the informal economy.

It is also an opportunity to provide conceptual clarification as words pile up, often telescoping, but not necessarily making much sense. Terms like recognition and informal, for example, are polysemous in this context and cover different realities. Since these realities are often close, this contributes to the complexity of usage, not to mention mistranslations, from English to French typically. Definitions are therefore proposed, and carefully adjusted for the French and English version of this Note: they aim to agree on concepts, rather than words, and to provide points of comparison, in order to complete the clarification of the glossary useful for informal apprenticeship.

Altogether, informal apprenticeship is a real system. It does indeed have a form of organisation, although there are local variations, considering important cultural aspects. Also, areas for improvement are identified. This Guiding Note argues that informal apprenticeship is unavoidable because it has no credible alternatives, neither in the short nor in the medium term. It is its greatest merit that it offers a training solution to many young people in an efficient and effective way compared to potential alternatives. Therefore, this Note argues for its improvement rather than for its disappearance through absorption into the formal system of vocational training, an option that seems hardly credible in the current state of social security systems.

This Guiding Note builds bridges with the work of the International Labour Organization (ILO), to which it is close in terms of analysis and conclusions.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

As West (ILO, 2018) reminds us, apprenticeship is not a complicated concept. It is a familiar approach in many countries and cultures. Apprenticeship originated many centuries ago. However, implementing it successfully requires great care, planning and attention. This Guiding Note only talks about one part of apprenticeship: informal apprenticeship. Yet it is already very long and probably incomplete.

Many countries have a large informal economy. Quite often, these countries also have a formal technical and vocational education and training system (TVET) that is relatively small in size and geographical coverage. Finally, the demand for training on the part of families and young people is very high, both because there is a strong appetite for training and because the age pyramid is very wide downwards, in the younger age groups. All the conditions are therefore in place for the development of a genuine system of informal apprenticeship. In fact, they have been present for a very long time and informal apprenticeship is often presented as a direct descendant of traditional apprenticeship – when the transmission of competences was organised within the family – when the two terms are not simply confused.

This Guiding Note aims to identify structuring elements, based on the few available studies and on a reflection based on fieldwork in many countries, for an analysis of informal apprenticeship and of the possibilities to improve its relevance, performance and therefore quality. To this end, the analysis focuses on two of the main dimensions to be described and analysed: the creation and recognition of competences. Creation refers to learning itself. Recognition refers to the assessment and acceptance by society - including employers - of the informal apprenticeship system as a creator of competences.

The final objective is to provoke discussions between the different actors and other stakeholders in the world of education/training and the world of work.

## 1.1 Single issue but multiple target groups

The definitions used - particularly those produced by the International Labour Organization - often emphasise that apprenticeship is for young people. However, the arguments developed for young people can often be applied to adults. In some cases, such as for the recognition of prior learning, the analyses and recommendations proposed are even significantly more relevant for adults, because they have more experience.

To simplify the discourse and analysis, this Guiding Note will speak of young people and initial occupational integration (school-to-work transition). However, the concepts, reflections and analyses produced here can also be applied equally to continuing vocational training, to adult learning in general, and to occupational reintegration, for women who have been out of work for a long time, for example, or for workers undergoing vocational retraining (i.e., who want to change occupation or job).

## 1.2 Introductory remarks

Unless otherwise specified, the term “employer” or “master craftsman” will be used to designate the person, in the enterprise, who is in charge of preparing the apprentice for the labour market. This can be an apprenticeship supervisor who is not directly the employer in the financial sense of the term, but this makes for more concise wording. Sometimes the term tutor is used.

Finally, in order not to make the text more cumbersome, it has been decided not to cite the documents on which the analysis is based whenever they would have deserved it, particularly in Section 5, which is largely based on the questionnaires prepared by the British Council (2020), Enabel (2020) and LuxDev (2020a and 2020b). The research work is also based on a review of recent literature (see bibliographic references), in particular the work of the International Labour Office (ILO). Finally, the analysis benefits from the author’s fieldwork over the past decades.

## 1.3 For a proactive reading

Before starting to read, the reader is invited to spend a few moments internally



formulating their expectations and views. Reflecting on how informal apprenticeship is perceived will help to read this Guiding Note and to agree or disagree with the arguments developed. Beyond that, it may help to better understand and use the Guiding Note, for example, in workshop discussions.

How is informal apprenticeship viewed by employers and learners, young learners in initial education and training and adult learners in continuing education, single employers or members of guilds and employers' federations/associations, international organisations, very small enterprises, small and medium-sized and large enterprises, government departments and TVET institutions?

And so, to help the reader, these few questions seem relevant:

- What is your definition of informal apprenticeship?
- How do you perceive its usefulness (e.g., social, economic)?
- What are its advantages (e.g., decent wage, inclusive, efficient, effective, trade based approach, decentralised, social peace, a stepping stone to the formal system, being able to set up on your own and convince clients, in line with the local culture, allowing the employer to have working time in exchange for training)?
- What are the advantages for young people (e.g., learning a trade, the only possible alternative, avoiding unemployment and idleness, becoming part of the local fabric, setting up on their own with knowledge of the local job market and potential customers)?
- What are the benefits for adults (e.g., promotion opportunities, decent wage, career change, geographical mobility, increased responsibility, improved autonomy at the workplace)?
- What are its disadvantages (e.g., poorly organised, not leading to qualifications, low quality learning, not all competences covered)?
- In what direction should it evolve (formalise it, move it towards quality and how, introduce recognition of prior learning)?

Generally speaking, what are the most obvious issues?

- Does informal apprenticeship prepare for too few occupations?
- Are learning outcomes sufficiently assessed during and/or at the end of the apprenticeship?
- Are the competences acquired in informal apprenticeship recognised by employers when they recruit?
- Is quality sufficiently considered in informal apprenticeship?

- Do apprentices in the informal apprenticeship system have a sufficiently high self-esteem?
- Is informal apprenticeship too often used as an opportunity for cheap labour?
- Is informal apprenticeship sufficiently formalised? Are there rules, probably oral, practices, social norms and are they applied and controlled? In particular, what about the following elements: written contract, time dedicated to training, working time owed to the employer by the apprentice (time serving)? Finally, if these elements are not present to a sufficient extent, would there be a risk that formalising informal apprenticeship discourages some employers from recruiting apprentices?
- Are employers sufficiently involved in the informal apprenticeship system, both to design curricula and to assess apprentices (qualifications standards, actual assessment of apprentices during or at the end of the apprenticeship)?
- Do graduates of informal apprenticeship find work? Is it a problem if they rarely find a job with an employer and have to become self-employed?
- Is the informal apprenticeship system a misogynist system that, after all, only responds to training needs for occupations that are typically occupied by men?
- Are the funding mechanisms in place properly sized?

The reader's response to each of these questions will allow a more proactive reading of this Note.

## 1.4 Structure of this guiding note

Some of the themes analysed in this Guiding Note could have appeared in several sections. For example, the introduction of a rotation system for apprentices to acquire a broader set of competences (ILO, 2012; Axmann, 2019) could have found a place in the section on assessment, in the section on apprenticeship patterns, or even in the section on equity among apprentices. It has been introduced in the section on meeting labour market needs but, again, it is a somewhat cross-cutting theme. To minimise the length of this note, the rotation has not been repeated in the other relevant sections, but this Guiding Note should of course be read with the idea of cross-fertilisation of the different arguments in mind. One exception is recognition of prior learning (RPL), which is present in several sections because it is so prominent in informal apprenticeship and is of interest from the point of view of all the themes addressed in all these sections. It is also to minimise redundancy that the sections are of unequal size.

This Guiding Note has ten sections. In addition to this introduction, the second section focuses on formal apprenticeship, and the third on informal apprenticeship. These two sections provide a clarification of key concepts for understanding this Guiding Note. The fourth section focuses on the different modes of informal apprenticeship. The fifth section provides an analysis of qualitative data purposively collected in several countries. Section six looks at the role of formal apprenticeship, and of RPL. Section seven looks at possible responses to labour market needs. The eighth section returns to the issue of quality, which has already been addressed in part in the previous sections. The ninth section argues that informal apprenticeship is effective and efficient. The tenth and final section offers conclusions and summarises the way forward.

## 2. APPRENTICESHIP – CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

### 2.1 Formal and informal apprenticeship

The informal apprenticeship system can be more or less organised and its degree of organisation is the focus of this Guiding Note. We will refer to formal apprenticeship and informal apprenticeship. However, to be clear, one of the conclusions of this Note is that there is not a single formal system on the one hand and a single informal system on the other, but rather a continuum from the very formal, exemplified by the German dual system for example, to the very informal, as is typical in Africa. Similarly, the system of informal apprenticeship can vary greatly from one country to another depending on the cultural context. The system of access to mastery of a trade cannot be read without this context; because competences that have currency in a given culture may not have any in another.

Another issue is that the term ‘informal’ is also polysemous, and ‘informal apprenticeship’ is different from “informal learning”. Section 3 provides definitions.

### 2.2 Formal apprenticeship

Although this Guiding Note is fundamentally about informal apprenticeship, it is interesting to start from the definition of apprenticeship in general, and even formal apprenticeship. This allows us to go back to the basics of apprenticeship and identify how informal apprenticeship may differ from formal apprenticeship (Section 3).

In addition, there is less work on informal apprenticeship than on formal apprenticeship or, more likely, less published work. On the other hand, there is a large body of literature on formal apprenticeship, so the concept of formal apprenticeship is of interest for establishing ideas, and for measuring possible differences between the two approaches/systems.

In terms of definition, then, apprenticeship is a system for acquiring occupational competences which is characterised by a significant presence in the company - generally between 50 and 100% of the time, depending on the type of apprenticeship and the

country; with live apprenticeships at the workplace, in contact with professionals, one of whom may be more specifically responsible for passing on the targeted competences, particularly in large companies. S/he is the tutor, and sometimes also the mentor<sup>1</sup>. The International Labour Organization (ILO, 2017) gave an initial definition of apprenticeship as early as 1939 (Recommendation 60 on apprenticeship)<sup>2</sup>. In 1962, this was replaced by the definition in Recommendation 117 on vocational training<sup>3</sup>, which contains eight paragraphs on apprenticeship. They emphasise the importance of the relationship between vocational training and the labour market. In this sense, it is in line with the generally accepted definition of vocational education and training, which aims at direct employment at the end of the training (as opposed to an academic course, which also aims at employment, but not immediately). The 1962 Recommendation also emphasises that apprenticeship training should be systematic and of long duration, be occupationally specific, be subject to specified standards, involve a significant amount of work in the enterprise, and be subject to a written contract. The Recommendation contains provisions on the content of the apprenticeship contract: conditions of access, duration, relationship between on- and off-the-job training, assessment, qualification, remuneration, accident insurance, and paid leave. It also addresses the accreditation and supervision of companies that wish to take on apprentices, as well as the types of trades that can be apprenticed. It is clear that this is a very formal system of apprenticeship.

The ILO 1939 definition, recently quoted in Axmann (2019), has the merit of being concise while containing all the important terms: “any system by which an employer undertakes by contract to employ a young person and to train him [or her] or have him [or her] trained systematically for a trade for a period the duration of which has been fixed in advance and in the course of which the apprentice is bound to work in the employer’s service”.

The next step is to define quality apprenticeship.

<sup>1</sup> *The tutor is in charge of transmitting professional gestures. The mentor inspires and can serve as a model.*

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/fr/f?p=1000:12100:9869593746820::NO::P12100\\_SHOW\\_TEXT:Y](https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/fr/f?p=1000:12100:9869593746820::NO::P12100_SHOW_TEXT:Y)

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/fr/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100\\_ILO\\_CODE:R117](https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/fr/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_CODE:R117)



## 2.3 Quality apprenticeship

Quality apprenticeship is a particular form of apprenticeship that meets a set of clearly identified conditions. Based on its historical work, and in particular Recommendation 117, the International Labour Organization has promoted this notion of quality apprenticeship by emphasising the quality of the apprenticeships and the relevance of the system to the needs of the labour market. Indeed, the International Labour Organization defines it<sup>1</sup> as a component of TVET that combines on-the-job training with learning in an educational institution. In this sense, quality apprenticeship draws heavily on the dual approach, as noted by Ganou (ILO, 2019).

Quality apprenticeship provides the knowledge, skills and other competences needed to perform a particular trade. The regulation and financing of these apprenticeship systems is based on laws, collective agreements and political decisions taken through social dialogue. In a good apprenticeship system, a written contract details the roles and responsibilities of the apprentice and the employer; apprentices are paid and have social protection. At the end of a structured and precisely defined period of training and after passing a formal assessment, apprentices are awarded a qualification.

While there are many ways to provide young people with a vocational preparation for the labour market that combines on-the-job training and school-based courses, a quality apprenticeship system according to the International Labour Organization is based on six essential elements<sup>2</sup>:

- meaningful social dialogue
- a robust regulatory framework
- clear roles and responsibilities
- equitable funding arrangements
- strong labour market relevance
- inclusiveness

These six elements are proposed and extensively developed in OIT (2017).

These six elements describe an ideal situation, which is consistent with their emphasis on quality. As such, they apply only to formal apprenticeship, and probably not in all countries. For informal apprenticeship, which is the focus of this Guiding Note, these six elements are still prescriptive rather than descriptive. Indeed, this Guiding Note will show

that this definition does not fit well with the reality surrounding informal apprenticeship. However, it will also show that there are no compelling reasons to believe that informal apprenticeship cannot meet these conditions.

<sup>1</sup> This definition is repeated, in a more or less detailed form, in several publications: see for example ILO (2017) or Axmann (2019) for the most recent ones.

<sup>2</sup> This Guiding Note is based on the original English versions of the reference texts and does not necessarily use the official French translation, especially where this is incorrect. For example, the term ‘manpower planning’ in the context of the relationship between training and employment has been criticized as not making much sense, either in theoretical terms - as the planning of the education system for the labour market does not work - or in practical terms for employers, as the labour market is changing far too fast for any real manpower planning to be of interest to them. The term “manpower planning” will therefore not be used here. The correspondence, or match, between training specialities and promising economic sectors and the production of skills expected by employers are more modern and relevant concepts; as are adaptability, the ability to adapt, to learn, to progress in the company, which are all concepts that are orthogonal to adequacy, which implies a far too rigid approach to teaching and the creation of skills.

### 3. INFORMAL APPRENTICESHIP – CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION (CONTINUED)

There is a significant gap between the use of informal apprenticeship, which is widespread in many countries, and the number of published analyses or even descriptions of the subject. Indeed, it is often international organisations that publish on informal apprenticeship, and the reference remains the International Labour Office (ILO, 2012). In a similar vein, there is little work on informal apprenticeship and quality. Again, it is the international organisations that seem to be the most active in the recent period (see for example Axmann and Hofmann, 2012; Lange et al., ILO 2020)<sup>1</sup>.

In terms of informal apprenticeship, the list of topics that are barely addressed can be extended to:

- assessment (summative and formative) of learning outcomes
- validation/certification of learning outcomes and competences
- the societal recognition of the qualifications<sup>2</sup> obtained in the apprenticeship system, whether formal or informal

These points are the focus of this Guiding Note and will be addressed in the following. Before doing so, this section proposes to continue the conceptual clarification work initiated in Section 2, focusing on the term “informal”.

#### 3.1 What does “informal” refer to?

The term informal, in the context of this Guiding Note, refers to four meanings:

- It is a component of the economy which, when it is not organised and/or escapes taxation<sup>3</sup> on companies or on value added for example, is said to be informal
- It is a type of employment which, when it is not registered and escapes income tax for example, is said to be informal
- It is a learning context which, when it is not organised in any way, is said to be informal as in informal learning, even if the exact term should be learning in an informal context
- Finally, it is a mode of acquiring competences at the workplace and in contact

with workers which, when it takes place in the informal economy, is called informal apprenticeship.

Thus, there is the informal economy, informal employment, informal learning, and informal apprenticeship. The definitions proposed above for these four terms show that the concepts they cover are close. However they are different, and it is difficult to understand the concept of informal apprenticeship, discussed in this Guiding Note, without the following brief clarification.

In terms of a country's economy as a whole, the informal economy generally refers to that part of the economy that is not subject to any form of formal organisation, including mostly taxes. The informal sector is used to refer specifically to those enterprises that are informal. The International Labour Organization defines the informal economy as “all economic activities of workers and economic units which - in law or in practice - are not covered or are insufficiently covered by formal arrangements” (Recommendation 204, 2015)<sup>4</sup>. In the case of the countries covered by this Guiding Note, the informal economy is hypertrophied as it can account for up to 75% of wealth production, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. It is therefore an essential component of the economy in the countries of interest (GIZ, 2020).

Informal employment is employment that is not declared to the competent authority and is therefore not registered (Charmes, 2020; Enabel, 2020; LuxDev, 2020). In general, those in informal employment do not benefit from any kind of protection (social security, unemployment and retirement). Regardless of the sector of the economy - formal or informal - in which it is performed, a job can itself be informal. This point is often forgotten in literature. Yet informal jobs are often found in the formal sector of the economy (Mansuy and Werquin, 2018), admittedly in smaller numbers than in the informal sector, but it is not a marginal phenomenon. While almost all jobs in the informal sector are informal, the reverse is not true, as many informal jobs can be found in

<sup>1</sup> EYF (2012) can also be consulted, although the work on quality does not necessarily focus on apprenticeship.

<sup>2</sup> The term “qualification” is taken here in its modern sense as a diploma, title, degree or other form of formal attestation of competences (i.e., as in National Qualifications Framework, or National Qualifications Catalogue). In this Guiding Note, qualification can be taken as a synonym for certification without loss of generality (see Coles and Werquin - OECD, 2007 - for a comprehensive analysis of qualifications systems).

<sup>3</sup> This argument was systematically repeated by the experts who responded to the survey used in Section 5.

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/fr/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100\\_ILO\\_CODE:R204](https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/fr/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_CODE:R204)

the formal sector of the economy; for example, when a duly registered company, subject to taxes and employing workers who are registered, makes occasional use of a support workforce that is not formally identified or registered by the competent services. This is even more frequent when the activities are highly seasonal and require additional labour at certain times of the year (e.g., harvests, influx of tourists). Informal employment is not necessarily a phenomenon of the informal sector of the economy. For this reason, the International Labour Organization prefers to use the term “informal economy”, which includes all people working informally in all sectors of the economy (rather than the informal sector, which refers more specifically to informal enterprises).

The context in which individuals learn may also be more or less formal. This refers to the generally accepted trilogy: formal, non-formal, and informal context, somewhat hastily referred to as formal learning, non-formal learning and informal learning. The latter terms are used incorrectly because it is the learning context that is more or less formal, not the learning itself. Even though the term informal learning context should be used, the term informal learning is widely used (Werquin, OECD, 2010). The learning context is informal when it is not structured in any way, e.g., without a specific schedule, regularity of any kind, or clearly identified funding. Furthermore, in informal learning, there are no intended learning objectives (outcomes) and no intentionality. We can probably also talk about informal training, self-training and/or self-learning, but clearly not informal education because precisely, education is organised (Werquin, 2015a and b).

Finally, there is informal apprenticeship. It is a mode of acquiring competences in contact with professionals, master craftspersons in particular, to learn a trade (ILO, 2012). Informal apprenticeship in this context is simply apprenticeship in the informal economy.

“Informal learning” means that learning can take place in an informal context; for example, outside of school, university, vocational training centre or other organised environment. In this sense, informal learning can take place in the formal sector of the economy. Indeed, it is recognised that informal learning happens all the time, everywhere and to everyone.

“Informal apprenticeship” refers to a system of acquiring competences for a trade with an employer operating in the informal economy. In some ways, informal apprenticeship is much more organised than informal learning. Informal apprenticeship is also much more specific as it is designed to ensure that the apprentice learns a trade. It is informal apprenticeship that is the focus of this Guiding Note. It is defined in detail in Section 3.2.



### 3.2 Informal apprenticeship - comparison with formal apprenticeship

For the International Labour Office (ILO, 2012), informal apprenticeship refers to “the system by which a young learner (the apprentice) acquires the competences specific to a trade or craft, in a micro or small enterprise, by learning and working alongside an experienced craftsperson. The apprentice and the master craftsperson enter into an agreement which is based on local standards and traditions. The cost of the training is shared between the apprentice and the master craftsperson.” The ILO (2017) refers to a form of apprenticeship that falls under “the informal economy and provides for the transmission of appropriate competences from an experienced craftsperson to a young person, usually covering all competences of a trade. These do not follow a curriculum, do not lead to qualifications and are regulated by social norms and traditions rather than laws and regulations”. This definition shows how important the wording is. Indeed, it is likely that for some experts, many master craftspersons follow what can be likened to a curriculum but they have it in mind, it is not written down. In support of this hypothesis, it can be argued that it has been repeatedly observed in the field that certain trade secrets or tricks of the trade are only shown/taught to apprentices at the end of the apprenticeship. The fieldwork shows that some apprenticeship periods are artificially prolonged because the master craftsperson does not reveal all the competences required for the trade at an early stage. This shows that s/he does follow a programme, but it is not necessarily explicit, and even less public. The International Labour Office refers to this as an informal training programme (ILO, 2012; and Table 1 below).

To return to the definition, Ndiaye (2020), for example, refers to renewed apprenticeship. He rightly insists that, in this case, apprenticeship is the subject of a contract between the apprentice and the master. In his view, it provides practical training in a production unit and enables apprentices to gain access to the titles, certificates and diplomas awarded in the vocational and technical training system. Finally, the modality of the recognition of prior learning (RPL) is accepted for the awarding of a qualification.

Despite the five-year gap between the two International Labour Organization publications above, the two definitions are consistent and emphasise the learning of a trade, and the employer’s belonging to the informal economy. In both cases, the authors also make a useful comparison between formal and informal apprenticeship (Tables 1 and 2). In fact, the concepts are often best understood by comparison. This is a risky exercise, as there are probably as many variations in systems of apprenticeship, particularly informal

apprenticeship, as there are countries, or even territories. The importance of the cultural context is regularly recalled in this Guiding Note.

For the International Labour Office (ILO, 2012) the differences are tenuous: the two columns in Table 1 are written in almost the same terms. There is a contract. There is creation of competences, at and with an employer, for the practice of a trade. The apprentice is a young person who actually works, and the employer invests in, and is committed to, the training of the apprentice. Fieldwork in Africa in particular, and the views of local stakeholders, do not necessarily reflect this image (see qualitative survey, Section 5). In summary, the International Labour Office's (ILO, 2012) vision is optimistic but has the merit of setting a course and supporting the idea that informal apprenticeship is a real system; and this is a pioneering argument.

**Table 1: Differences between formal and informal apprenticeship and informal apprenticeship according to the International Labour Office (2012)**

<b>Elements of the apprenticeship</b>	<b>Formal apprenticeship</b>	<b>Informal apprenticeship</b>
Training contract between employer and apprentice	Written contract between employer, apprentice and sometimes training centres/schools	Oral or written contract between master craftsperson, apprentice and sometimes apprentice's parents
Apprentice achieves occupational competence for a trade	Broad skills that enable	November 2022 (estimation)
mastery of a trade	Broad skills that enable mastery of a trade	The first round of monitoring missions for grant projects started in November 2020 (to be completed in February 2021) (see Annex 5, here: Guiding note Monitoring Mission).
Training is workplace-based and integrated into the production process	Training is workplace-based and usually complemented by courses in training centres/schools; formal curricula or training plans	Training is entirely workplace-based, often following an informal training plan
The apprentice is a young person	Usually the case, some regulations include age limits, others do not	Usually the case, risk of child labour
Costs of apprenticeship are shared between employer and apprentice	Employer invests time and resources (including apprentice's wage), apprentices provide labour service, government provides financial support	Master craftsperson invests time and resources (pocket money, in-kind), apprentice provides labour service and sometimes fees

Source: ILO (2012)

For ILO (2017), the exercise is more detailed but still very binary (Table 2). It has the merit of clearly identifying what distinguishes formal from informal apprenticeship. And according to the International Labour Organization, there are many differences, especially regarding informal apprenticeship:

- the lack of tripartite governance
- the lack of a written contract between the apprentice and the employer
- the lack of guaranteed social security coverage
- the lack of a legal framework
- the lack of written/formal/explicit curricula
- the lack of access to theoretical education outside the workplace, typically in a vocational training centre
- the lack of systematic and organised assessment, and therefore
- the lack of recognised qualification at the end of informal apprenticeship.

This is a realistic view (confirmed by the results provided in Section 5), even if a coding on several positions could undoubtedly have revealed more nuanced situations. The fact remains that the only real similarity is in the area of on-the-job training.

It is also possible to argue that informal apprenticeship and formal apprenticeship are relatively close in terms of the existence of a contract. The difference is that it is often oral in the case of informal apprenticeship, although the example of Ghana has recently paved the way towards written contracts even in informal apprenticeship. In any case, the existence of a contract, even an oral one, is essential for informal apprenticeship, otherwise the person is merely an assistant for basic tasks, e.g., an unpaid family helper not seeking training.

Finally, many employers cover costs with regard to health expenses, or even tools broken in the course of work, in the context of informal vocational training. However, there is no guarantee and many aspects of social protection in the broadest sense are not covered by the informal apprenticeship system. This is an essential area to explore.

**Table 2. Typical differences between formal and informal apprenticeship according to the International Labour Organization (2017)**

	<b>Apprenticeship</b>	<b>Informal Apprenticeship</b>
Tripartite governance	Yes	No
Remuneration	Yes	Possibly
Written contract	Yes	No
Social security coverage	Yes	No
Legal framework	Yes	No
Programme of learning	Yes	No
On-the-job training	Yes	Yes
Off-the-job training	Yes	No
Formal assessment	Yes	No
Recognised qualification	Yes	No
Duration	1-4 years	Variable

Source: ILO (2017) based on Steedman (ILO, 2012)



### 3.3 The halo around informal apprenticeship

This Guiding Note does not venture into the field of other concepts related to work-based learning, of which apprenticeship is a part. Different concepts and definitions, see e.g., ILO on “traineeship” and “internship” (2017), do not have a consensual translation to French. A homogeneous definition or concept therefore is missing.

As a matter of fact, the examples proposed by the International Labour Organization do not come from the French-speaking world (for example, Australia).

In the UK, for example, it is simply not the case that apprenticeship is defined by a legal framework and regulation. It is a *Common Law*<sup>1</sup> country which gives legal effect to “social norms and traditions”. Furthermore, the distinction between “traineeship” and “apprenticeship” varies from country to country, and is even interchangeable in the English-speaking world. In other words, it is already unclear in English, and translating it adds complexity.

Similarly, including the existence of tripartite governance in the definition of apprenticeship may be surprising since apprenticeship existed long before the formation of trade unions and professional associations - in the 19th century in the UK and France - in most countries.

Overall, there may be some confusion in the work of international organisations between description and prescription; between an account of what is the case and an assertion of what should be the case, or what would be desirable. This is particularly important in a Guiding Note that aims to promote apprenticeship in all its forms because too much prescriptive formalisation can undermine the willingness of implementation by governments and employers. Indeed, completing a prescription of apprenticeship - with a set of conditions that would be, or that are perceived to be, too restrictive or even burdensome - could discourage emerging economies from taking the first step in building a system of formal or less formal apprenticeship. The situation in some countries - such as Bangladesh, India and Pakistan - suggests that this is sometimes more than a hypothesis: these countries have long-standing and fairly restrictive laws on apprenticeship, yet in practice apprenticeship is not used much. It used to be in the large public sector companies, but when they were privatised, most of that old apprenticeship system fell away.

To conclude on this point, it is clearly interesting to distinguish between the different forms of learning in the workplace: apprenticeship, internship, immersion in the company, placement in a company, and even temporary occupational integration are terms that are used, but their use is neither standardised nor consensual. Differences exist, and it is good that we are thinking about them, but the risk is to arrive at an extreme refinement of definitions that is not very operational. This is a risk because the exercise could remain purely theoretical and has few practical applications. It is a risk above all because it could prevent actors and other stakeholders from realising that the situation is unclear in practice, and that it is changing in time and space. It needs to be accepted that there are terms that are used in all contexts, such as 'internship'. In English, it is still relevant to distinguish between apprenticeship (learning a trade on the job) and internship (learning on the job as well, but not with the aim of completely mastering a trade), whereas the Francophone world treats these terms differently.

The key point is to realise that the main differences are whether companies have really taken over apprenticeship and are in the driving seat (real apprenticeship) or whether it is the vocational training centres or the government that are trying to convince companies of the relevance of apprenticeship, e.g., to offer traineeship places.

<sup>1</sup> Common law countries (e.g., Australia, Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom) have a legal system in which the rules are mainly laid down by the courts in the course of individual decisions. Case law is therefore the main source of law.

### 3.4 Summary - Useful glossary

So, it is quite clear that the learning context can be more or less formal, and therefore in particular quite informal; and that work-based learning, or apprenticeship, can also be more or less formal. The latter is quite formal when there is a written contract between the employer and the apprentice, when this contract has all the characteristics of an employment contract, when apprenticeship leads to qualification and the apprentice is an employee like any other (e.g., the German model). It is informal when many of these characteristics are not present. It is not uncommon, however, for informal apprenticeship to have some formal features, such as assessment, but this does not make it a formal apprenticeship system: in practice, however, see Table 2, it is often more nuanced.

All in all, it is an antinomy that seems to best characterise informal apprenticeship because learning refers to a system, while informal refers to an absence of organisation. This is undoubtedly what makes it difficult to grasp, both by the researcher, the statistical observer, and the decision-maker. However, the antinomy is only apparent and informal apprenticeship is, in fact, aptly named. It is indeed a system for learning a trade, and it refers to a form of organisation of the creation, or even the recognition of competences. It is informal because its organisation remains incomplete, and there is still much room for improvement. This paradox is only apparent because it is indeed a system and it is unavoidable: it is in place, and has been for a long time if we consider that it has gradually taken over from traditional apprenticeship<sup>1</sup>, which is even more family-based (ILO, 2012). These observations are important because they will help to derive some of the most important analyses in this Guiding Note: it is essential because it is very inclusive and allows the greatest number of people to have a chance, even in population groups with a low socio-economic index and/or living in isolated geographical areas. The fact that it deserves to be better organised refers to the recommendations that this Note puts forward. Finally, the difficulty in grasping its scope - for researchers and decision-makers - argues strongly in favour of a more precise and systematic statistical apparatus, or even its inclusion, in terms yet to be defined, in the national TVET system.

This Guiding Note identifies the two trilogies as key concepts for analysis:

- to learn a trade, apprenticeship, apprentice; and
- to learn, learning, learnerx.

The first allows to focus on informal apprenticeship, and even on quality informal

apprenticeship. The second allows a relevant approach to RPL, which has an important role to play in the certification and recognition of competences acquired in the apprenticeship system, especially if it is informal.

This Guiding Note also needs the following concepts:

- the practical part of the learning process (*on-the-job*), and
- theoretical part of the learning process (*off-the-job*).

These two concepts are not specific to informal apprenticeship. In fact, the opposite can be said: the theoretical part, in a vocational training centre for example, is almost always absent from informal apprenticeship.

<sup>1</sup> The term “traditional” is still quite used in English: see Ganou (ILO, 2019) or Teal (2020) for recent contributions.

## 4. THE DIFFERENT MODES OF INFORMAL APPRENTICESHIP

### 4.1 Strengthening gender equality

While the criticism of being a misogynist system is probably wrongly applied to formal apprenticeship, as Axmann (2019) notes as a myth, it corresponds to a reality for many experts and stakeholders (ILO, 2018). It seems that informal apprenticeship is unbalanced in favour of men in terms of numbers. The lack of reliable data does not really allow us to decide. However, fieldwork - particularly in Africa - reveals that stakeholders in certain occupations, which have a high proportion of women, are occasionally active in informal apprenticeship: hairdressing, agriculture, small-scale manufacturing, secretarial work and occupations that are strongly linked to the use of information and communication technologies. The example of hairdressing in Benin is interesting from this point of view (see the work of Swisscontact, over the last decade). On the other hand, it is true that informal apprenticeship is not very developed in terms of numbers for these trades. In other words, it is not the number of occupations that are potentially attractive and accessible to informal apprenticeship for women that is the limiting factor, but rather the initiatives to develop informal apprenticeship for these occupations, or even to generalise it: the opportunities exist but they are rare. There are avenues for improving gender equity, simply by developing informal apprenticeship in apprenticeship streams that are more popular with young women.

The real objective remains that of the feminisation of fields of study that are heavily frequented by men, and vice versa. The results from the field are extremely enriching from this point of view. Let's say it straight away, it is very difficult to get young women to go into fields like construction or mechanics. Stereotypes are still very present despite the many experiments to deconstruct them from pre-school onwards, especially in Europe (ILO, 2018). Yet access to pre-school education is difficult in Africa for example. However, when they do come to occupations heavily frequented by men, the empirical findings are always the same: it starts with a lot of scepticism from employers - and some mockery from male apprentices - and it ends with a situation where employers have changed their minds and only want to recruit young women. They are much more careful with equipment, save raw materials and fuel, and are held up as examples of a whole range



of qualities (see for example, training women to drive construction equipment in Haiti; MTPTC, 2013).

The list of occupations in which young women could enter a apprenticeship is therefore virtually the same as that for young men. In practice, however, it is proving very difficult to convince women to learn a trade that they mistakenly think is a male trade. Progress towards gender equality in access to all occupations through apprenticeship is likely to be difficult: there is a strong atavism in the relationship between traditional and informal apprenticeship and in the fact that assets are more often passed on to male children (Jutting et al., OECD, 2008). In practice, informal apprenticeship often does not offer the possibility of selecting apprentices for positive discrimination, for example, because young people are recommended by family or a member of the employer's circle, and/or especially because the employer is looking for young people with a particular profile, such as a certain work experience and/or apparent talent by the targeted trade (ILO, 2012). It is therefore not easy to over-impose a gender equity requirement.

Overall, in theory, it is excessive to claim that informal apprenticeship only makes sense for young men. All trades can be learned through informal apprenticeship. In practice, the situation is still far from equal. To strengthen gender equality in the informal apprenticeship system, a comprehensive communication strategy must be developed and implemented. All stakeholders - primarily teachers/trainers, employers, families, and future female apprentices - need to be informed about the benefits of gender equality in access to any trade. We must also undoubtedly make it easier for women who want to take the plunge, by providing a much tighter framework for women's apprenticeship in terms of working hours and the division of family work - typically for mothers - and working conditions. Finally, the feminisation of certain occupations will benefit greatly from mechanisation: as long as sheer strength is a recruitment criterion, access will be difficult for young women.

## **4.2 Promoting decent work in informal apprenticeship**

From the first table of the International Labour Office report (ILO, 2012), the "risk of child labour" in the case of informal apprenticeship is highlighted. Again, precise data are scarce but fieldwork shows that the risk is real. ILO (2018), for example, also points to this pitfall and the need to put measures in place to prevent informal apprenticeship from being an

easy way for some employers to gain access to cheap, indentured labour for many years. In addition, and this has been proven even more widely, employers who recruit apprentices through informal apprenticeship tend to confuse professional work with household tasks. All of these issues are linked and relate to the motivations of employers and the need to frame and supervise informal apprenticeship a little more.

The difficulty is that imposing constraints on the recruitment of an apprentice in the informal system is difficult. Not only is it informal and therefore poorly controlled, but there is a risk that this will discourage employers from taking on an apprentice if they perceive that the conditions are too restrictive. For example, in Morocco, the conditions for recruiting an apprentice described in Law 12-00 are restrictive, and perceived as dissuasive<sup>1</sup>. One could imagine that the duration of the apprenticeship or the assessment of competences - if any - would be better framed, to avoid the apprentice being too dependent on the employer. It is also clear that issuing a certificate early on in the apprenticeship process - for a block of competences for example - and then a full qualification a little later on, could allow the apprentice to become autonomous quickly if they perceive any risk of being treated unfairly.

All these measures - such as the block approach and/or qualification - have further properties which will be established as this Guiding Note progresses.

<sup>1</sup> <http://carfm.ma/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/1-Loi-12-00.pdf>

### 4.3 Quality – Governing the performance of school leavers/ graduates in the labour market

Quality apprenticeship is, on the whole, fairly easy to define. Reference can be made to Lange et al (ILO, 2020), which is one of the few publications that discusses quality in the context of informal apprenticeship, mainly for the assessment of competences. Of course, one can also refer to ILO (2017) for a reference work on quality in apprenticeship in general. In the case of formal apprenticeship, it is extremely difficult to verify whether the quality criteria are met. In the case of informal apprenticeship, it is impossible.

There is something more worrying. Even if the quality criteria, as repeatedly stated in the literature, are met, there is no guarantee that competences are actually transferred between the employer or master and the apprentice. There are many examples where all the conditions for good learning and competence accumulation are met - from infrastructure to materials to teacher qualification - but where no competences are ever transferred to learners. This Guiding Note therefore takes a strong stance in suggesting an end-point approach, through the performance of apprentices in the labour market, in employment, once their period of apprenticeship is over.

As a matter of fact, if we go back to basics for a moment, the purpose of TVET in general, and of apprenticeship and informal apprenticeship in particular, is to enable rapid, sustainable and quality integration into employment. This suggests to look at the conditions under which apprenticeship graduates have been integrated into the labour market and deduce the quality of the competences acquired and their level of recognition by employers and society. In the case of informal apprenticeship, this is in fact the only practical solution. The only constraint is that follow-up surveys, preferably somewhat longitudinal - i.e., repeated once or twice - should be carried out to find out what happens to the graduates of informal apprenticeship.

Most pilot systems for apprenticeship include a tracer study. It is often poorly treated - and mistreated, for that matter - because it comes at the end of the line, and the initial budgets allocated are often exceeded. All that is needed is to secure this part of the budgets allocated to TVET, and to apprenticeship in particular, so that we have all the tools we need to make a clinical link between the passage through a particular apprenticeship and performance on the labour market. At a time when all young people

have one or two smartphones, this is neither expensive nor technically complicated because they are easy to reach. Moreover, they are often motivated to respond because their occupational careers are at stake. It is enough to collect their contact information, and even a few key variables, and contact information for relays (parents, family) to create a survey base in a very efficient manner. Evaluating the quality of a system by the success of the participants in real life protects the observer and the decision-maker from a whole series of observation biases during the learning period. Finally, the potential of this type of follow-up survey to feed back into the informal apprenticeship system is enormous, since the diagnosis is serene.

In order to reassure the stakeholders of vocational education and training, there is always the possibility of doubling this end of the line approach with a more classical quality assurance approach. It may indeed be worthwhile to provide concrete elements for the steering of apprenticeship systems, if only to provide support for new entrants to the training offer. Thus, it is always possible to provide a list of elements that are worth considering in order to imagine providing quality apprenticeship. One can think of<sup>1</sup>:

- a shared and documented opportunity study on the appropriateness of a particular trade - or apprenticeship programme - given the nature of the local labour market (shared by learning and labour market stakeholders);
- a selection of apprentices, not on socio-economic criteria, but on the relevance of their training and occupational career plans, considering the nature of the local economic context and the labour market - or even on the existence of prerequisites for entry if the targeted level of output is high - which in any case refers to the need for a guidance service; apprenticeship is and must remain a local approach to serve local needs;
- a certain number of data known at the time of entry into the apprenticeship: duration, exit conditions, treatment of the apprentice (remuneration, possibly in kind), nature of the supervision, access to external teaching assistance for learning theoretical elements, nature of the rotation on several workstations to multiply the chances of exposure to new competences, exchanges of apprentices with other

<sup>1</sup> Based on the author's work, ILO (2012), ILO (2018), Lange et al. (ILO, 2020), and ILO (2017).

employers for the same reason;

- clear apprenticeship objectives, set at the beginning of the learning process and written in terms of learning outcomes and/or competences (with a dynamic/action verb and the context of the action);
- learning objectives that offer general and specific competences (employability potential);
- a clear division of the elements to be acquired between knowledge, know-how and transversal competences;
- a curriculum that is consistent with the learning objectives, including details of the method, core modules and markers of learning progression; (e.g., the nature of interactions between apprentice and tutor/employer, apprentice and clients)
- an intrinsic coherence of this curriculum in relation to the learning objectives;
- a reliable, valid, fair, and authentic assessment; the employer is involved in the assessment, but not alone;
- a partial or complete qualification (registered in the National Qualifications Framework and Catalogue) with a clearly identified level or, more likely, the awarding of a certificate of competence with value on the local labour market;
- passing on important information to the apprentice throughout his apprenticeship; the apprentice is informed, for example, of new regulations or the arrival of new products on the market;
- a guaranteed social protection system, particularly in the event of an accident at work;
- the system itself is well governed, in partnership; this does not necessarily mean central coordination, but there is fluid and controlled communication within the informal apprenticeship system; the actors in the system are perceived as legitimate

(chambers of commerce and or industry, chamber of crafts, federations, professional associations, trade unions, local political authorities);

- the apprenticeship system is co-constructed, and quality assurance is seen as the responsibility of all actors (in partnership again); and
- statistical surveys (tracer studies), repeatedly conducted (longitudinal), if possible, and monitoring and evaluation of informal apprenticeship.

This list proposes only the main blocks, the heads of chapters. These building blocks can then be broken down further according to the objectives pursued and local practices. This is not done here so as not to lengthen this Guiding Note.

Putting together such a set of characteristics/conditions will take time. For anyone who has worked on the ground in close proximity to those involved in informal apprenticeship - e.g., employers, tutors, apprentices, professional groups - there is something unreal about this list. The questionnaires used in Section 5 are clear in this respect: it is an ideal situation rather than reality at this time. Nevertheless, until the governance through qualification (measuring the outcomes), is in place, it is important to have benchmarks for quality assurance: by proposing these features of an ideal system of informal apprenticeship, this Guiding Note can be used as a checklist. Finally, defining a vision involves setting long-term goals. This is the proposed way ahead, although it will probably take time.

Defining the quality of informal apprenticeship by the outcomes (after training), thus, by the nature of social and occupational integration, seems a pragmatic solution but remains challenges. One progressive example in this sense is the competence-based approach, as it has been replacing the definition of inputs in a training process through focusing on the learning outcomes.





## 5. SYNTHESIS OF RECENT STUDIES ON INFORMAL APPRENTICESHIP

### 5.1 The material that underlies the entire Section 5

The questionnaires used for this survey were drafted and completed in English or French. This section provides an analytical synthesis of the five questionnaires available, for Burkina Faso (2), Niger (1), Pakistan (1) and Palestine (1). It also benefits from a number of works given in the final references.

### 5.2 Rather than a description, a perspective

The available questionnaires are used to identify the characteristics of informal<sup>1</sup> apprenticeship. The responses are therefore data. However, the analysis is that of the author of this Note: it is based on the perspective of these questionnaires with his work in several dozen countries, in different regions, including Latin America, Africa, the Caribbean and the Arab world.

Finally, it is essential to stress that the analysis proposed here should not be read in comparison with the analysis that could be provided for the formal vocational training system. It is not clear that, from the point of view of many issues, the formal vocational training sector is much better off. In any case, this analysis aims to provide elements for framing and reflection on the basis of answers provided by experts from several countries. It does not aim to award good or bad points to one or other of the vocational training systems.

### 5.3 Informal sector, learning and the economy

#### 5.3.1 The informal sector of the economy

The vision of what constitutes the informal economy is consensual among the different respondents. There are nuances between respondents/countries but the essence remains the same, notably the fact that the informal economy is not structured and that it escapes

taxation. These are the two main axes along which the analysis of what the informal economy is in the countries of interest is constructed. In addition, some respondents explicitly link it to other forms of informality, such as informal apprenticeship (Burkina Faso), which is the focus of this Guiding Note.

There is also a general consensus that the informal economy is necessary because the formal sector alone cannot absorb all the workers in the countries concerned, especially the young people who enter the labour market every year. As a result, there is a general awareness of the importance of the informal economy, not only because of its size, but also because of its economic and social importance; *economic* because of its contribution to the creation of wealth, and therefore to the Gross Domestic Product, and *social* because it absorbs a large number of workers and many young people in the initial insertion phase. Moreover, countries such as Nigeria or Ghana, for example, have proactive policies in favour of the formal sector of the economy, as their decision-makers are aware of its importance in all respects, particularly as a provider of jobs and guarantor of social stability. The logic is very clear: it is more relevant and effective to help the informal economy do better what it already does, rather than risk reducing its economic and social functions by trying to formalize it at a forced march.

It is nevertheless true that the respondents are lucid and highlight the precariousness of the people who work there. The words used are quite often strong: for example, poverty, working poor, subsistence economy.

The interesting point, in terms of potential recommendations, is the unanimity that exists around the conditions for the formalisation of the informal economy: it cannot be reduced to subjecting the actors of the informal economy to taxation. The idea that emerges is rather that the operation must be win-win. This can be achieved by considering the demands and expectations of stakeholders in the informal economy. This would mean that a mechanism should be put in place to collect the views, and probably also

<sup>1</sup> This section uses the term 'apprenticeship' even though the paper prepared for Palestine clearly states that there is no apprenticeship system in the informal economy and prefers to talk about training. As this is probably a translation or definitional problem, which is quite common, this difference will not be retained and the terms 'apprenticeship' and 'training' will be used interchangeably here.

to help these stakeholders verbalise their needs. The respondents do not go that far in the analysis, but the idea of introducing elements that would satisfy the needs and expectations of economic operators, including workers, is there. In any case, there are unavoidable elements such as fiscal policy, which should be adjusted if the idea is to encourage economic operators in the informal economy to migrate to the formal sector of the economy. Access to finance, interest rates and workers' rights are also part of these essential elements.

### **5.3.2 Training in the informal economy - General**

As for the role of training in the informal economy - or informal apprenticeship again - it is perceived by all respondents as a necessity, for example to enable higher incomes for workers; and thus, to contribute more significantly to the development of the economy and the country. Training is uniformly perceived as particularly important, even in the informal economy, and even if it remains informal (see issues). What is very important in these responses - from the point of view of the core of this Guiding Note - is that training is not associated, in the respondents' thinking, with the formalisation of the informal economy, and that competences creation is therefore perceived as indispensable in the informal economy. To be clear, even though the questionnaire has just talked about formalising the informal economy, respondents do not link learning in the informal economy with formalising the informal economy. They do not make it a necessary condition. This is therefore proof of the acceptance of the potentially formative role of the informal economy, even if it takes place mainly in the craft industry and is technical (e.g., professional gestures), but this point is not consensual and opinions are divided.

There was also no clear consensus on the issue of the employer taking responsibility for the apprentice, although the informal apprenticeship system was often described by respondents as being very similar to a family system, and thus in particular to a system where the employer takes responsibility for the apprentice's food and sometimes even accommodation and/or transport.

### **5.3.3 Issues identified in informal apprenticeship**

Taken together, the detailed criticisms of informal apprenticeship provide a fairly realistic picture. There are many issues at stake and the views are rather pessimistic.

### Undefined learning objectives

First of all, the detailed learning objectives are unclear, and not decided in advance (see for example LuxDev, 2020a). The target occupation is known, of course, but the creation of competences is not planned in detail, nor is there a collective approach that would contribute to a mapping of the supply of competences or of vocational training. In general, the statistical apparatus needs to be improved and the strategic steering of vocational training in the informal economy is difficult.

It does not seem possible either for decision-makers to create a training provision - by opening a class in an existing centre or by creating a vocational training centre from scratch, as in Morocco with the *Cités des métiers et des compétences* - when competences are lacking in quality or quantity. In short, informal vocational training is not regulated, either in legislative or regulatory terms. Even if there are rules, they are not applied. This lack of framework applies in particular to the use of curricula, which is not part of teachers' habits. This is a very frequent result, even in the formal education and training system, especially with regard to the practical part of the alternation schemes.

### The needs of employers are not known and not necessarily met either

There is no guarantee that employers' needs will be met. This criticism is overused because it is directed at all education and training systems, formal or otherwise, in almost all countries of the world. It is nevertheless true that it emerges from the responses, and that it has a double meaning. In fact, the informal economy does not have mechanisms for collecting employers' needs. Even if this were the case, the previous point shows that it would be a waste of time since the creation of competences is not organised in such a way as to satisfy needs that may have been verbalised.

In general, there is no involvement of professionals in defining the contours of informal apprenticeship. Professional organisations do not seem to be able to take ownership of the issue of informal apprenticeship. The reasons for this are not clear, but they are likely to include: lack of interest, lack of time, lack of vision of what future workers and recruits should be like, lack of tools - such as statistical equipment - and lack of resources, such as a part-time consultant who could focus on the issue and monitor progress. This is very clear in Gabon and Nigeria with regard to RPL, which the professional associations are calling for but which they are unable to develop due to lack of time and technical support.

And then there are exceptions, as in Niger, for example, where the tripartite partners (or social partners) have the technical knowledge to participate in social dialogue, including in the area of apprenticeship. This is one of the reasons why employers' and workers' organizations and the government are represented in the decision-making bodies of the Fonds d'appui à la formation professionnelle et l'apprentissage (FAFPA) to discuss training and apprenticeship issues.

### **Variable learning time, not well known in advance**

In a similar spirit - that of the lack of codification of informal apprenticeship - the length of the apprenticeship period is not fixed ex ante. According to one respondent, it can extend to ten years, indicating a clear confusion between training period and recruitment, between training and work. This has important consequences. It is indeed difficult to define learning objectives - see Section 3 - if the duration of the learning is not known with some precision at the time of its implementation. More fundamentally, this flexible approach totally precludes the possibility of the learner being able to define his or her career plan in an unhurried way, a theme central to modern approaches by guidance counsellors and educational psychologists. In these approaches, the concept of a project encompasses the acquisition of competences, or even the obtaining of a qualification, and the definition of a occupational project (e.g., a status and an occupation). Beyond that, this undoubtedly indicates an excessive dependence of the apprentice on his employer and apprenticeship master, whereas the acquisition of a status such as that of a self-employed person requires a fairly rapid move towards autonomy. This is clearly a point that deserves a research programme to better understand the issues. There seem to be some contradictions here, which are probably not prohibitive, but which are intriguing at first sight.

### **A pedagogy to be questioned**

A certain number of issues, formulated in different terms depending on the respondents and the context, refer to pedagogy, or rather the absence of pedagogy. The issue is that the apprentice master, and often employer, does not necessarily have the pedagogical or didactic competences necessary to transmit his or her competences. Moreover, the acquisition of a competence may sometimes require the use of didactic material - to enable the progress of the learning to be monitored - which is not available in a company. In addition, the master trainer can only teach the competences that he or she has, or believes he or she has. This necessarily limits the range of competences to which the

apprentice will have access during the apprenticeship. Even if the apprentice has been able to formulate a plan, or at least set learning goals, he or she may not have the opportunity to achieve those goals. Finally, the master apprentice may not fully master the competences he or she is aiming to impart, which may affect the apprentice's performance when hired or self-employed.

And then, as informal vocational training is not without its paradoxes, there is the recurring difficulty that the teaching time is very short in informal apprenticeship, while the apprentice is present in the company for years. The diagnosis that emerges from the questionnaires used for this section is that, in informal apprenticeship, the apprentice works a lot and trains little.

### **Missing competences**

Another issue that is regularly raised is the bias introduced by the de facto confusion - in daily activity - between production and training. The employer's objective is profitability, which means responding to market demand. However, if this demand is not very diversified, the apprentice is not exposed to all forms of production, and does not necessarily mobilise all the competences that correspond to his or her [future] trade. In a training system in the strict sense, the learning objectives are given by the curriculum. In the case of informal apprenticeship, the acquisition of competences, since it is given by the day-to-day practice and the demand of the customer of the enterprise where the informal apprenticeship takes place, remains difficult to plan. This does, however, provide an argument for a long period of learning, since it increases the likelihood of touching all the components of the trade.

This is obviously both a disadvantage and an advantage. It is a disadvantage if one considers that customer demand may not allow for the full range of competences expected of an aspiring professional (for example, a situation where a carpenter's customers only order windows would run the risk of the apprentice only knowing how to make windows). This is an advantage because there is a high probability that the apprentice will remain in the same geographical area after training. As a professional, they will know exactly what the local customer's expectations are, and will have the competences to meet them.

Some respondents cite in detail competences that would be absent from training in the informal economy, such as keeping up with technological change, mastering information

and communication technologies and managing a business. The last point is particularly compelling because fieldwork often reveals cases of business failure not because of a lack of technical competences but because of a lack of business management competences (e.g., budgeting). Access to entrepreneurship training has arrived in many training programmes in the formal education and training system, but not yet in informal apprenticeship.

Finally, and in the same spirit, informal apprenticeship is too often oriented towards learning technical gestures. Graduates who have become autonomous may lack theoretical knowledge, particularly knowledge linked to their trade, which will inevitably limit their ability to adapt, and also knowledge linked to the management of a business (e.g., stock management, use of cash flow).

### **A low capacity for innovation**

The above-mentioned matter of lacking knowledge and competences reveals another strong issue of informal apprenticeship: there is a significant risk that apprentices will become masters in the art of reproduction but will have little capacity for innovation. While the ability to innovate is undoubtedly primarily a matter of personal predisposition, it is nonetheless true that training - if it provides itself with the means to be a place of intellectual effervescence - is a good opportunity to try things out and proceed by correcting errors. Given the profit-maximising objective generally adopted by employers - which is the logical objective of a private enterprise - there is little chance that the apprentice will be allowed to step outside the production routine to experiment with innovation.

Again, the lack of use of modern technology, especially information and communication technology, is also a barrier to innovation.

### **Limited recognition of competences – Qualification**

Most of the issues mentioned above relate to the creation of competences. Another set of issues relates to the assessment and certification of competences (for the awarding of a qualification). At the individual level, a qualification a major component of employability. At the collective level, in order to organise the training-employment relationship, qualification is also a determining factor because it makes competences visible. Employers



are better able to organise the allocation of workers to the various jobs if they know the competences of each person (job matching). It is therefore not clear that informal apprenticeship is an operational system in so far as assessment is problematic, poorly organised, and RPL has not yet made a significant entry into this system. It is unanimously identified as a credible solution for certifying competences acquired in the informal economy, even if there is a good awareness of the conditions (e.g., preparation of RPL professionals), and if the concept of RPL does not always seem to be well understood (e.g., RPL is not a training process, nor is it a competences assessment).

From the point of view of the end of the informal apprenticeship process, the conditions for organising the closing ceremony - when there is one - are not fixed either. In particular, the cost that it can sometimes represent for the apprentice is a strong issue of his or her empowerment, and of the passage from learner to full professional. The case of Benin is interesting from this point of view. A closing ceremony was sometimes strongly postponed due to the inability of the apprentice to pay the expected fee (Davodoun, 2011).

### **Lack of guidance and of tracer studies in the informal apprenticeship system**

Two strong further issues are highlighted by the respondents. They do not refer exactly to the same findings, but they are grouped together here by a sort of pragmatic shortcut from the point of view of solutions. These are the guidance provided to apprentices and the follow-up of school-leavers (tracer studies). Neither of these are really part of the informal apprenticeship system.

Guidance is about guiding apprentices to make informed choices, both before they enter informal vocational training and during their apprenticeship. Academic guidance can be distinguished from vocational guidance if necessary, but the fact remains that young people in informal economy training have few opportunities to benefit from the disinterested and professional help of a third party, typically an educational and training psychologist.

Follow-up refers to the idea of acquiring somewhat systematic tools to find out what happens to those leaving the system once they are autonomous, both on the labour market (employment, unemployment, promotion) or in terms of their personal situation (family, opinions). Social integration and occupational integration are two elements that

are at the heart of longitudinal surveys of school leavers in any education and training system. In the case of informal apprenticeship, information on these two elements is lacking for a sound analysis of performance. (See also the quality issues in Section 3)

### **Highly heterogeneous informal apprenticeship**

All in all, then, informal apprenticeship is marked by great heterogeneity, which does not facilitate recruitment processes by employers, since they do not know exactly what competences the candidates from informal apprenticeship bring along.

In fact, the analysis offered here is intended to be neutral, although the diagnosis of respondents is sometimes harsh: informal apprenticeship is said to be marked by amateurism, it is said to be an avenue of recourse, and it is said to be charitable. This Guiding Note does not wish to go to such extremes, but it is true that informal apprenticeship still suffers from many shortcomings. There is a lack of clear rules, such as the duration of the apprenticeship, the signing of a written contract, the conditions of exit, the pedagogy used and the supervision provided in the company, the nature of the learning objectives and therefore the competences that will be mastered at the end of the process. Finally, there is no uniform funding system, the infrastructure is of poor quality and the system is not administered. The quality assurance criteria discussed in Section 3 are definitely very ambitious.

Again, the overall impression is quite paradoxical: informal apprenticeship is necessary because it fills a gap, but it is also said to be sub-optimal. It is also the diagnosis at the heart of this Guiding Note that it is still too early to talk about an alternative to informal apprenticeship: nothing is in place to replace it, and it remains unavoidable for the time being. In simplistic terms, informal apprenticeship is far from perfect, but it does exist. It is a real system. The challenge is to improve it and there are many solutions to do so. Not all these solutions are necessarily relevant, such as distance learning, which does not convince the experts who prepared the answers to the questionnaires; for technical reasons for instance, or because of the varying approach to informal apprenticeship, which remains centred on learning a trade and on learning by doing in contact with established professionals. However, it will be seen later that this option of distance learning should not necessarily be rejected, particularly for the acquisition of additional competences, entrepreneurial knowledge, and/or elements of theory in general.

At first glance, the question that comes to mind is whether all these questions are asked, and whether all these issues are addressed in the formal apprenticeship system. From this point of view, a fundamental difference needs to be emphasised because it is not always clearly stated: apprentices in the informal economy do not benefit from the intervention of a training structure (vocational training centre or other) which could provide theoretical knowledge or takes care of the training of trainers and the qualification process if necessary.

### **5.3.4 A constructive social dialogue?**

In the area of social dialogue, it is sometimes difficult to understand the answers of respondents, for example because they are very ambiguous. A simple “yes” does not always allow us to measure the extent to which single characteristics are present in the system. It seems clear, however, that there is a constructive social dialogue with regard to vocational training and apprenticeship in the formal sector of the countries of interest. This is much less clear in the informal economy.

In fact, the idea is even put forward that, when a structure is in place to represent enterprises in the informal economy, such as the National Employers’ Council of Burkina Faso, it focuses more on structured and formal enterprises. In fact, in Burkina Faso, there is also the National Federation of Artisans (FENABF) which has sought to improve informal apprenticeship with the help of the World Bank.

Still somewhat synthetically, the tripartite partners are engaged in collective bargaining in the countries of interest. However, it has yet to be developed, as e.g., in Burkina Faso, because the approach is recent and/or because apprenticeship - not to mention informal apprenticeship - is not yet on the agenda.

There is a strong consensus that tripartite partners have the technical knowledge to participate in social dialogue, including apprenticeship in general. Some trade union officials have received training in this regard, as in Burkina Faso. However, the question remains as to whether they have a grasp of the issues in terms of apprenticeship in the informal economy. The tripartite partners are unequally involved, depending on the country, in the accreditation of vocational training centres. Generally speaking, the

accreditation of vocational training centres is a matter of a precise procedure, defined by law and/or in the hands of the government. In Burkina Faso, for example, there is now a strong involvement of employers alongside the State, which used to own the majority of training centres, but is now seeing the rapid development of private training centres. Formal frameworks already link these different parties. In Niger, there is a body for the selection and approval of training centres created within the FAFPA (*Fonds d'appui à la formation professionnelle et l'apprentissage*) to decide, among other things, on this issue.

On the other hand, there is a clear consensus that the tripartite partners are aware of the problems of the informal economy and therefore support its development as well as the recognition of apprenticeships in the informal economy. One example is the Informal Sector Support Directorate (DASI) within the Burkina Faso Ministry, which has been in existence since 2006.

### **5.3.5 A sound regulatory framework?**

As in many areas, the apprenticeship sector is relatively well regulated, whereas this is not the case in the countries of interest for informal apprenticeship, where there are many shortcomings. On the other hand, some neighbouring countries such as Benin, Ivory Coast and Togo seem to have a slightly better organised system of informal apprenticeship. Some professional federations are involved and organise, for example, the entry ceremony, the assessment, the delivery of an end-of-apprenticeship certificate and the closing ceremony. In Mauritania, the professional federations are also very active, for example in the area of RPL.

In particular, the dynamic between the tripartite partners in terms of the legal framework, and vocational training in general, is weak. There is at best a committee or council, but there are doubts about what it actually does, and how often it meets. Minimum and maximum lengths of the apprenticeship period are fixed in the case of formal apprenticeship, but this is not the case for informal apprenticeship, as seen above. There is a legal framework for vocational training centres in the formal system only. There is always a contract between employer and apprentice in the formal system, whereas in the case of informal apprenticeship it is essentially a verbal agreement; even if the regulations often require a formal written document (as in Burkina Faso). The difference

between the regulations and their implementation in practice can be seen very concretely in this example. The functioning of the informal apprenticeship system is marked by this opposition.

Apprentices are unpaid and uninsured, but this applies to both formal and informal apprenticeship, which contradicts the work of international organisations (Tables 1 and 2). In fact, everything is left to the discretion of the employers, who often arrange to provide food and care where necessary, sometimes transport and/or accommodation, rarely remuneration (pocket money at best) and even more rarely insurance; they themselves are apparently not insured. However, nothing is systematic and informal vocational training is aptly named: everything is definitely informal.

The assessment of learning outcomes, and the issuing of a certificate - not to mention a transcript of grades obtained, which is not used at all - are real gaps in both systems. There are, for example, certificates that can be given to graduates of informal apprenticeship, but they are not recognised, and therefore not used in the labour market<sup>1</sup>. This is a very serious shortcoming for young people with low economic means who could have used informal apprenticeship as a steppingstone to the formal education and training system. Here again, RPL appears to be the most viable (because effective and efficient) solution. The recommendation here is twofold in fact: it is a question of creating bridges, and for this purpose RPL is a very credible option, because it is not only a tool for the certification of competences, but also a means of allowing access to the formal education and training system without the academic prerequisites (Section 6.2).

Finally, there may also be a significant gap between what the frameworks provide for and the reality on the ground, which does not facilitate diagnosis and the search for solutions to improve the situation. There is no quality assurance in the informal apprenticeship sector as a whole.

<sup>1</sup> This is in contrast to Benin, for example, where the *Certificat de qualification aux métiers (CQM)* - awarded at the end of a successful apprenticeship - is recognised.

### **The role of the tripartite partners**

In the countries of interest, it appears that employers are involved, directly or indirectly, in the design of apprenticeship systems for legal recognition, and in the implementation of apprenticeship programmes. This is clearly due to the fact that the private sector is the engine of the economy and, in the case of the informal economy, it is very large in the countries concerned. It is therefore even more of a driving force. Their involvement is less clear in the creation and adaptation of qualifications; at best it is irrelevant as there are no qualifications issued.

Trade unions also play a role in designing apprenticeship systems for legal recognition and in implementing apprenticeship programmes, except in Palestine.

Finally, the government also plays a central role everywhere in designing apprenticeship systems for legal recognition, in setting up and adapting individual certification of the experience learning outcomes acquired through informal learning and in implementing apprenticeship programmes. However, it seems that it could still do better, especially in Burkina Faso, where a more active involvement would be necessary to renovate informal apprenticeship and move towards quality apprenticeship.

### **5.3.6 Conclusion**

In conclusion, as suggested several times in this Guiding Note, the informal apprenticeship system is aptly named: it is a system, it enables learning, it prepares for the labour market. However, it is not really organised: it is informal. Apprenticeship is nevertheless seen as the most effective way of transmitting technical knowledge, know-how and even interpersonal competences to learners and apprentices because it is a form of training that takes place directly in the real world, in a very practical way within a company. This note even argues that it is effective and efficient (Section 9).

After this direct confrontation with the reality of certain countries, some conclusions are in order:

- It is not clear if there is a necessity to develop a very sophisticated quality approach, given the limited applicability of most of the criteria and the impossibility of verifying them on a large scale;

- In the same vein, it is also not clear if the concept of quality apprenticeship has any applicability in the context of informal apprenticeship because the terms of the definition are barely met in reality (for quality apprenticeship, for example, one speaks of a written contract, remuneration, guaranteed social protection, a structured training period, a programmed end which barely exist in the case of informal apprenticeship); moreover, Ganou (ILO, 2019) confirms all these shortcomings for informal apprenticeship in five Sahelian countries;
- Formalising the informal apprenticeship sector is a bad idea; and
- RPL seems to be an option that has only advantages for the assessment and validation of informal apprenticeship; in particular, it makes it possible to give a great deal of legitimacy to the whole process of informal apprenticeship by issuing a qualification, without having to formalise the learning process itself, which appears to be very efficient.

In sum, the two approaches of “quality apprenticeship” and “improving informal apprenticeship” are linked.

The first approach - on apprenticeship in general - describes a desirable, ideal approach and a direction in which the apprenticeship system in general should go. The idea is not to give constraints to stakeholders in learning systems and to award good points. The cultural dimension is indeed essential and underlies this Guiding Note. It is hardly possible to talk about quality in apprenticeship without taking into account this cultural context, and the societal elements that make certain learning outcomes, knowledge, skills and/or attitudes more valuable in one country, or territory, than in another.

The second approach - that of improving the quality of informal apprenticeship in particular - is thus naturally situated in the general context of improving the quality of apprenticeship. Improving the quality of informal apprenticeship is bound to improve the quality of apprenticeship itself.

The work of the International Labour Office can be read in the light of this convergence between quality apprenticeship and the improvement of informal apprenticeship.



## 6. THE ROLE OF FORMAL VOCATIONAL TRAINING

With this section on the role of the formal TVET system (formal vocational training in the following), this Guiding Note addresses one of the central themes of the analysis. As is now clear, this Note does not propose in any way to formalise informal apprenticeship. That would be too time-consuming, too costly and not consensual enough, especially for employers who are often only offered tax liability, with no compensation in terms of access to the competences they need or to a social protection system, for example.

On the other hand, this Guiding Note argues strongly for the organisation of a reflection on how best to make the two systems (informal apprenticeship and formal training) cooperate. This section aims to show that there are many bridges - qualification, practical component of apprenticeship, or RPL - and that they need to be built because they offer many avenues for the development and recognition of competences.

### 6.1 Fostering links between formal training and informal apprenticeship

#### 6.1.1 A win-win approach

Formal vocational training exists alongside informal apprenticeship in almost all countries. This is because the participants in the two systems (teachers, tutors, employers and apprentices) cross paths very regularly; because one draws inspiration from the other in terms of method and curriculum; because employers are approached by young people from both systems for work experience (understood as the practical component of apprenticeship); because the graduates will be learning the same trades; and because they are ideally aiming for the same qualifications.

Fostering links between formal training and informal apprenticeship makes sense because it is a win-win situation. For the world of formal vocational training, being in touch with the informal apprenticeship system:

- provides access to internship places, always understood as the practical component of apprenticeship;

- allows to have access to an immeasurably large pool of potential recruits, i.e., future apprentices; for example, young people who aim to enter formal training - after a period of informal apprenticeship - because they want to obtain a higher level of qualification; the role of informal apprenticeship as a stepping stone to further or higher education is never discussed, probably because no one believes in it, but it is an avenue that has advantages, especially in remote areas where there is no formal education and training provision;
- allows to have access to an equally large pool of professionals who can potentially contribute to the formal vocational training system, to co-construct curricula or to intervene as assessors in RPL; one of the problems of RPL in fact is the availability of competent personnel rather than the number of potential candidates; and
- allows to be in direct contact with demand: the demand for competences expressed by employers operating in the informal economy, and also the demand for goods and services since employers and apprentices in the informal economy are in direct contact with customers; there is much to learn.

For the world of informal apprenticeship, being in touch with the formal training system:

- provides direct access to study and/or curricula;
- provides direct access to a clear didactics;
- provides access to a body of good practice since the actors in the formal training system are teaching professionals (for assessment, for monitoring, for pedagogy, for didactics); and
- provides access to know-how in the field of RPL.

Moreover, RPL, apart from its intrinsic advantages (access to qualification, recognition of all learning outcomes), is undoubtedly the main bridge that links formal training and informal apprenticeship since it almost by definition links the world of work and the world of learning. Moreover, if it is a RPL leading to qualification, it will naturally be a bridge for all apprentices in the informal apprenticeship system who want to continue their studies in the formal education and training system.

### 6.1.2 A significant need for feedback, not really perceived

One of the characteristics that best describes countries with large informal apprenticeship systems is that the need for feedback, i.e., cross-fertilisation between all the education and training sub-systems, is often underestimated. This paper argues that it is not unusual for a range of subsystems to exist side by side within the lifelong learning system<sup>1</sup>:

- education and initial training,
- the different sectors of the initial system (secondary, tertiary),
- continuing education,
- learning in non-formal and/or informal contexts,
- the system of RPL.

However, it is not normal for these systems to behave in a competitive manner. Many of these systems operate in silos and their stakeholders work in closed circles. One idea would be to promote the transfer of experience in all directions, and to make it a win-win situation. No one - and especially not young learners and apprentices - has an interest in these different sub-sectors behaving in a competitive way, for example by withholding information.

For example, if a mapping of vocational training is set up, all the stakeholders are winners if they all contribute to it. The integrated information system that could result from this could allow all actors to position themselves better in the large education and training market, both public and private.

Again, for example, the amount of experience that can be gathered from observation of the continuing education system and the system of RPL is untold. Both provide very precise information on the expectations of employers (see the work of the Observatory of Branches (OdB) in Morocco, for example). However, the lessons that can be learned from these experiences are rarely used to feed back into the initial training system, and young people continue to be trained in competences that are no longer needed by employers, or to be poorly prepared to use competences that are needed.

Lastly, the example of standards - training standards or qualification standards - is the most troubling. In fact, it is often impossible to get teachers and trainers, for example, to produce the training standards they use. The same applies to assessment, which is often not well understood in practice when one is doing field work: it seems that the qualification standards are absent, or that there are several versions.

All in all, bringing together the different education and training systems and sectors would make it possible to move forward on the road to inclusiveness so that young people from disadvantaged neighbourhoods or backgrounds for instance, can distinguish themselves in informal apprenticeship and have the opportunity to be oriented towards the formal education and training system, or even higher education. Informal apprenticeship as a steppingstone to formal education and/or higher education is not generally seen as an opportunity. However, it is a way to solve certain difficulties such as geographical distance.

Similarly, allowing a link between formal training and informal apprenticeship would make it easier to put in place additional training for graduates, or near graduates, of informal apprenticeship; in particular with regard to theoretical knowledge traditionally neglected in the informal apprenticeship system (ILO, 2017; Section 5). A system for positioning school leavers by assessment on theoretical knowledge, both general and related to the targeted occupation, would be easy to construct. It would make it possible to send school leavers with shortcomings to formal education, and it would be up to the latter to create these short and effective modules, which are in any case the future of the TVET system, which will have to be modularised to respond to the logic of blocks of competences, and to satisfy the demands for short training of those who fail RPL assessment.

The integration of informal apprenticeship into the national training system could thus take place naturally if informal apprenticeship retained its specificity; that is, to be highly inclusive, effective and efficient. We would have a system of TVET, two sub-systems, with different objectives and modes of operation - for example recruitment, assessment - but two sub-systems interacting, for example for the sharing of curricula, assessment and qualification frameworks, experience, and professionals (evaluators, coach, guidance counsellor, educational psychologist). One could even imagine inviting companies to join the movement, to help apprenticeship masters increase their competences, for example, and/or their level of qualification.

<sup>1</sup> *These subsystems are not mutually exclusive.*

## 6.2 Institutionalisation of recognition of prior learning

Talking about RPL in the context of informal apprenticeship is complex because it can occur at several levels:

- for apprentices on entering informal apprenticeship, to position them correctly in terms of relevance to competences already acquired (i.e., prior to informal apprenticeship, through any previous practice), competences needs, consistency with the project, and personal predispositions;
- for apprentices still, but at the end of informal apprenticeship, to make up for any shortcomings in the system of assessment of learning outcomes in informal apprenticeship, in order to be able to issue them with a qualification (registered in the National Qualifications Framework) or a certificate of occasional value (temporary and/or local); and
- for employers and/or apprenticeship masters, finally, to help them progress in terms of professional reference, because a qualification is an essential element in marking quality; and to encourage them to get involved in the professional development of their apprentices, since they would also be winners.

This section proposes an analysis of these three situations, and shows why RPL is an effective and efficient solution. Before doing so, it is necessary to briefly recall what RPL is.

### 6.2.1 What RPL is and does - and what it is not and does not do

As a Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) approach can be mobilised in several scenarios in the informal apprenticeship system, it is important to recall what RPL is, and what it can do. As indicated in the previous section, RPL can be mobilised for what it is: to assess non-formal and informal learning outcomes, outside any formal context; outside the system, so to speak. It can also be mobilised to make up for the shortcomings of the assessment of apprentices' learning outcomes in the informal apprenticeship system.

The issue of assessment of learning outcomes in vocational education and training and that of RPL are a priori different situations. The proposal in this Guiding Note is to reconcile the two:

In the first case, the assessment of learning outcomes in the apprenticeship system refers to the assessment of apprentices who are [more or less] formally registered in a system and, in any case, objectively identified as apprentices being in a training period. Their assessment should therefore normally be based on a classical approach (it is not RPL):

- method: continuous assessment under the responsibility of the employer and/or the tutor; and/or a final assessment with statements provided by the central authorities to ensure fairness and quality;
- objective: to check the achievements in relation to the learning objectives defined by the qualification standards; and
- result: edition of a report of notes, and a decision if to deliver the targeted qualification.

In the second case, if there is no training programme, RPL can still be used to assess non-formal and informal learning outcomes, whatever they may be (Werquin, OECD, 2010). If the country's legal framework allows it, RPL can even deliver a full qualification at the end of a non-formal and informal learning process.

The opportunity that RPL represents is, as described above, that a classical approach to assessment (with formal examination) does not seem to exist on a large scale, or at all in some countries, in the informal apprenticeship system (see Section 5). The point of view advocated in this Guiding Note is that it is much more effective to use the RPL approach - which is already in place in many countries, which is being tested in many others and, most importantly, which has been proven to work - than to use the traditional assessment approach. This is especially true when there is not even a cultural basis for assessment in informal apprenticeship.

RPL is an interesting opportunity to achieve several objectives because it is a very flexible instrument. Indeed, contrary to a widely held idea, RPL does not solely deliver a full qualification to successful candidates. RPL is first and foremost an assessment method and its applications highly vary (Werquin, 2012), even though they very often have a qualification as a terminal objective, there are other important milestones, for example:

- awarding of credits for a qualification;
- exemption from academic prerequisites to enter the formal education and training

system;

- exemption from all or part of the curriculum;
- authorisation to register for an exam as an independent candidate;
- assessment for an adequate positioning at the beginning of the training;
- delivery of a certificate of competence with temporary value - for three or five years, for example, pending the acquisition of additional competences necessary for full qualification - and/or local value, i.e., value only on the local labour market, or even in a single company with which an agreement has been reached;
- identification of competences to be used on entry to training - normally continuous, here informal apprenticeship - so as not to have to train in competences already mastered;
- delivery of a partial qualification; and
- delivery of a full qualification.

Several of these possibilities represent a real advantage for informal apprenticeship (see Sections 6.2.2 to 6.2.4 below). Incidentally, they are not mutually exclusive, and may all eventually lead to qualification, albeit very indirectly. This is probably why the best succinct description of RPL remains that it is an “alternative route to qualification”; as are the formal apprenticeship system (dual, alternate, or school-based), initial education and training, and continuing education and training.

RPL is a process. It involves several steps, from the identification of the candidate’s objectives to the delivery of a qualification, a partial qualification or any of the options proposed above, including registration (administrative and pedagogical), documentation of prior learning, accompaniment and assessment (see Werquin, OECD, 2010 for a full description of the RPL process).

In the case of informal apprenticeship, the idea is therefore to use RPL for both the apprentices and their employers and/or tutors. These options are developed in the rest of this Section 6.

### 6.2.2 RPL for the positioning of apprentices at the beginning of the apprenticeship.

As the previous section has just reminded us, RPL is not just another route to qualification. It is also a convincing method, proven in many countries, for assessing all learning outcomes, regardless of the context in which they took place. Thus, if potential apprentices have experience, one possibility would be for them to ask - typically their tutor - to have their potential learning assessed. The potential benefits are many, and at several levels, to:

- enable future apprentices for whom competences have been identified to move directly to a high level of autonomy, for example, and/or responsibility in the company where they are doing their informal apprenticeship; this could enable them to develop other competences as part of the informal apprenticeship. These could be transversal competences, for example, in dealing with the customer, or with other workers;
- allow the employer to better organise the work, which gives an additional motivation to recruit an apprentice, since it will be possible to know right away how to best use the apprentice's competences;
- allow apprentices to better organise the construction of their expertise since they will be able to suggest to the employer to position them - partially at least - on positions or tasks where they will be able to acquire competences that they do not yet have; and
- to create confidence, both self-confidence for the future apprentice in whom RPL will have helped identify competences, and confidence between the employer and the apprentice.

Organising a positioning of RPL at the entrance to informal apprenticeship, however, leads to several points of attention:

- The competences mentioned at the entrance to informal apprenticeship are not necessarily highly developed competences; they may be competences in the making, such as manual or intellectual predispositions, a certain talent or even a pronounced



taste for a trade; RPL is designed to identify this gradation in competences, because it is built to assess the competences that candidates have (and not the shortcomings as it is often the case in school, for example); RPL is a fundamentally positive approach;

- There are no stakes for apprentices, who can therefore perceive the exercise as a plus, as an exercise that can only benefit them if necessary: if they do not have any competences at the outset - which would be quite normal since they are about to enter training - there is no reason to perceive it as a problem. If they do have competences, it allows them to use those competences to gain additional autonomy, for example;
- It is the young person who should request the assessment; it does not seem desirable to impose it on him or her; indeed, it is important to avoid discouraging young people from engaging in informal apprenticeship if they are not comfortable with the assessment, which is often the case for those who have had a failed school career, for example; and
- It is undoubtedly rare, but it is possible to meet young people with experience and the corresponding assets, because RPL is designed to accept all forms of experience, including private experience; however, when young people leave school early, they begin to accumulate experience very early on, and the role of RPL will be to assess the extent of this experience in the different field(s).

### **6.2.3 RPL for the certification of competences of apprentices in the informal economy**

While there are several advantages of RPL in relation to informal apprenticeship, the main one is that it offers a method of assessing learning outcomes that has been tried and tested for several decades. For once, the two terms informal apprenticeship and informal learning come together, since it would be a matter of using a RPL approach to assess the learning outcomes of apprentices leaving the informal apprenticeship system since, in essence, it is only the learning outcomes that count and not the origin of that learning; which is usually the case, by definition, when RPL is implemented for an individual. This

can be done by asking the apprenticeship master to explicitly authorise this RPL approach - as is the case in Tanzania - to avoid early exits on the part of apprentices; this could have the effect of demotivating employers who would no longer take on apprentices.

The idea is to relieve the employer, or apprenticeship master, of the burden of having to assess the apprentice during the period of informal apprenticeship itself. The idea would be to use the RPL approach, towards the end of the informal apprenticeship period, to assess the apprentice's achievements against an assessment framework, preferably consensual. If there are qualifications standards in the formal system for a given qualification and the apprentice in the informal apprenticeship system is aiming for this qualification, then this is the standards to use. Experience shows that the question of standards is delicate and, in practice, it will be necessary to proceed on a case by case basis according to whether qualification standards exist or not.

In practice, adopting an approach whereby the entire assessment of the apprentice would be based on a competences portfolio seems difficult to implement, as there may not be the necessary level of confidence everywhere about what RPL is. Mastery of the written word could also be an issue, even though modern competences portfolios generally protect against this by accepting photographs, sounds and videos. Low confidence remains the main problem if there is no practical, on-the-job assessment. For the moment, therefore, the only credible approach is to assess candidates in real life, in the workplace or in a simulated workplace. Usually, in a classical RPL system, employers do not like to have assessors come to the workplace - observation versus simulation of the workplace - as this is likely to disrupt the work, of the apprentice of course, but also that of the colleagues and the whole company. In the case of informal apprenticeship, as the employer is involved in the young person's development from the start, the assessment by observation is much easier to carry out.

However, if the employer - or the apprentice - has reservations, it is still possible to proceed by simulation. In this case, an infrastructure is needed. This can usually be done using existing vocational training centres, many of which have technical facilities that could be rented out at off-peak times (evenings, weekends). They are usually willing to lend/rent their technical facilities, as they are often looking for subsidies to equip themselves, or to buy materials.

## Possible methods for assessment by RPL

Assessment by RPL can be based on several methods which are not mutually exclusive:

- - portfolio of competences,
- - practical test(s) in a simulated work environment,
- - observation in a real work environment,
- - written exam(s) (essay, test),
- - multiple choice questionnaire(s),
- - oral examination,
- - interview(s),
- - professional conversation,
- - case study(ies) (with explanation),
- - final jury, or
- a combination of the above methods.

Not all approaches are suitable for all audiences: candidates with difficulties with the written word may have problems preparing a portfolio of competences, although modern approaches generally allow the use of non-written materials such as photographs, videos, sounds or drawings.

Source: suggested by the author

#### **6.2.4 RPL for employers and master craftspersons training apprentices**

If RPL is a relevant approach for apprentices, it is undoubtedly also relevant for employers, in the context of informal apprenticeship. As a matter of fact, one of the issues that has long been underestimated is that of taking into account the qualification needs of employers, master craftspersons and/or apprenticeship masters who take on apprentices. If informal apprenticeship offers solutions to certify the learning outcomes of the apprentice while neglecting to take into account the possible qualification needs of the employer, tensions could arise. Promoting the apprentice alone and neglecting the employer may generate mistrust on employer's side who may fear unfair competition from a newly qualified apprentice who is self-employed and taking away their customers.

In practice, the approach is relatively simple: it would be enough to ensure that there is always a level of difference between the qualification offered to the apprentice and that offered to the employer, through RPL. The hierarchy would thus be preserved, and the employer could be reassured that he would not be overwhelmed by an apprentice who has reached a higher level of competences than that of his employer, an apprenticeship master. Incidentally, it would also limit the hesitation of some employers to pass on all their competences without ulterior motives.

Again, this is the objective, to maintain a hierarchy between employee and employer and not to risk conflict. However, it will be the VAE assessment that will determine the respective levels of competence. It is therefore necessary to anticipate and prepare a coherent and acceptable response if it turns out that the apprentice has a higher level than the employer; but this is most probably a rare case.

In the same vein, offering to train a master craftsperson would be a win-win situation: he himself would be more competent, and he would become a better trainer, to the greater benefit of the informal apprenticeship system as a whole.

Finally, in order to have a peaceful situation, the apprentice's access to RPL can, and probably must, require the explicit agreement of the employer or the apprenticeship master.

### 6.2.5 Institutionalising RPL is a convincing approach

All in all, institutionalising RPL at the end of informal apprenticeship seems to be a convincing approach. It is not without risk, particularly because, once again, contrary to a fairly widespread idea, it is not free. There are fixed costs, such as accompanying the candidates, paying the assessors, renting the technical platform for the assessment and the cost of the material if the practical assessment is chosen; to mention only the main ones. RPL has a cost, but it is immeasurably lower than the cost - economic and social - to a country of not certifying competences duly acquired by young people in the informal apprenticeship system. If we take only the business climate criterion, for example, the level of qualification of the workforce is one of the very first criteria used by international investors to set up in a country, and thus create jobs.

Institutionalising RPL in and for the informal apprenticeship system should also not be too complicated. Indeed, many countries are both legislating and implementing pilot experiments (see the interesting, because very advanced, cases of Mauritania and Colombia). It would therefore only be a matter of adding RPL to the panoply of options available to apprentices in the informal apprenticeship system. According to law, it could also be the other way around: it would be adding informal apprenticeship to the areas covered by RPL.

In any case, it does not seem appropriate to institutionalise RPL only in and for informal apprenticeship, i.e., to create a RPL subsystem at the margin of the general RPL system. For example, if there are already assessment or qualification standards - in the Ministry of Education or Labour for example - they should be used in informal apprenticeship as well. All the decisions taken by the country in the field of RPL must be applied in the same way to RPL in informal apprenticeship (assessment method, right to support, nature of the qualifications accessible to RPL, conditions of eligibility). It seems more relevant that informal apprenticeship is part of RPL, and that RPL is part of informal apprenticeship<sup>1</sup>. There is no reason to make informal apprenticeship a special case in terms of RPL: RPL should be accessible as in all other subsystems. It just needs to be made explicit in the general legislative framework of RPL. This is the shortest route to institutionalisation: not to make informal apprenticeship an exception, but part of the rule. There are learning outcomes to be assessed and potentially validated, so RPL is an opportunity for informal

apprenticeship.

RPL is one of the most inclusive systems in the world of education and training: with or without a high academic level, with or without resources, with or without a personal or professional network, any candidate is welcome as long as he or she has learning outcomes to demonstrate. As long as they know and/or can do, they are ideal candidates for RPL. This is the missing element in the informal apprenticeship system.

In particular, it will be much easier to implement quality assurance if RPL is introduced into informal apprenticeship. Indeed, by definition, RPL is not concerned with the inputs - i.e., the process of acquiring competences (time volume, duration) - but with the learning outcomes themselves. Quality assurance is therefore much easier and cheaper in RPL because it applies only to the process of assessing the candidates; and it is a perfectly transparent process, perfectly marked out, which is easy to control from the point of view of its quality.

The only tricky point that needs to be carefully considered is the number of people. If RPL becomes the main tool for certification of competences in informal apprenticeship, the number of candidates will quickly become very large. This is not neutral in terms of budget, recruitment and capacity building.

<sup>1</sup> In Togo, a form of RPL is used but only to assess apprentices at the end of their apprenticeship.

## 7. MEETING THE NEEDS OF THE LABOUR MARKET

Being able to anticipate the needs of the labour market is one of the major challenges of informal apprenticeship, as its proper functioning depends on its ability to meet the expectations of employers and the needs of the labour market in general. If the quality of informal apprenticeship is to be improved, it is essential to look at the occupations to which it leads and the competences that are in demand. This challenge is not specific to informal apprenticeship – as a matter of fact, it applies to the entire vocational training system - but it is even more complicated in the case of informal apprenticeship. This section details the problems that are regularly identified and proposes elements of a solution; with a focus on meeting immediate labour market needs in the short term, as opposed to identifying long-term needs which is a matter for foresight work which is not addressed here.

In other words, this Guiding Note only addresses issues of immediate matching between informal apprenticeship and the labour market in terms of the occupation, and the competences to perform some or all of the tasks or activities involved in that occupation. It does not address the issue of new trades.

### 7.1 The apprentice does not necessarily acquire all the necessary competences

In terms of informal vocational training, the risk is often mentioned that the employer only passes on to the apprentice a part of the competences contained in a qualification - in its standards typically - and/or necessary to carry out a trade in total autonomy; as, for example, the production of the company where the apprentice is would be unbalanced towards one or another product or service. It may also be due to a choice by the employer and/or apprenticeship master not to involve the apprentice in a particular task or activity. In all cases, this is because the company does not produce a product or provide a service, or because the apprentice has never had the opportunity to produce a product or provide a service, he or she has not been able to invest in the corresponding competences through practice. This is a point made clear in the responses to the national questionnaires used for this Guiding Note (Section 5).

Exposing the apprentice to all the competences contained in a qualification framework and/or that constitute a trade - to all the tasks and activities - is an essential component of informal apprenticeship since, by definition, informal apprenticeship is essentially about learning a trade; and it is the provision of appropriate qualification that is at the centre of much discussion (ILO, 2015; Lange et al., ILO, 2020), and at the heart of this Guiding Note.

One solution could therefore be to multiply the opportunities that the apprentice has to be exposed to competences that are relevant to his future job and the qualification he is aiming for. This can be done through a communication campaign with employers, if it is only a question of internal work organisation and rotation of employees in different positions in the company. In this case, it can also involve incentives for employers to take this necessary rotation into account in the specifications of the contract, even if it is an oral contract for informal apprenticeship.

However, it may not be that simple. There are many cases where the employer is the only (self-employed) worker apart from his apprentice(s). It is therefore impossible to imagine any kind of internal rotation, and the idea is rather to network employers with an external rotation of apprentices. In a system of external rotation, an apprentice would have to move from one company to another, from one apprenticeship master to another, from one production system to another, and from one internal organisation to another in order to acquire a broader set of competences (see for example ILO, 2012). The apprentice's journey would start and end with their 'main' employer and the intermediate stages could be arranged to suit all stakeholders. This is not simple to implement, partly because employers in the same productive sector in the same geographical area are likely to operate in the same way, produce the same goods and/or provide the same services. It is also not straightforward, not least because few employers would agree to adapt their production to the arrival of an apprentice for whom they are not even responsible. There is a problem of managing production time, because it is dictated by customer orders. It is not easy either because of the assessment of the apprentices' achievements, the implementation of which is likely to be complicated by the multiplicity of employers, even though it is already not the strong point of the informal vocational training system. This difficulty is also highlighted by the International Labour Office (ILO, 2012) in the context of guilds, for journeymen. The authors also emphasise that this is quite common in the formal apprenticeship system but that there are many barriers in the informal apprenticeship system where this approach is marginal at the moment.



## 7.2 Certifying useful competences - RPL for immediate adaptation to the needs of the labour market

The RPL approach is described at length in section 6.2. It is relevant in this section because it calls for the involvement of at least one professional in the group of assessors, among the three assessors. A panel of three assessors - one teacher, one professional and one RPL expert - is the usual recommended size. This is because professionals are better able to identify the competences that are really part of the workers' everyday work.

In fact, the RPL approach is naturally oriented towards the labour market and the needs of employers, since it is designed to identify a set of presumptions likely to confirm that the candidate has the potential to be or to become a good professional very quickly. The recognition of prior learning, if its objective is to award a qualification, remains linked to an approach by profession. RPL therefore offers a concrete solution for assessing the competences of apprentices in the informal apprenticeship system and ensuring that the assessment is oriented by construction towards the expectations and needs of employers.

## 7.3 Developing the statistical system and developing it in the informal system

Little is known about the informal apprenticeship system. Fieldwork provides experts with a good understanding of the mechanisms underlying this form of learning. However, these qualitative approaches need to be complemented by quantitative approaches.

Bringing informal apprenticeship squarely into the realm of official statistics would help decision-making. It is probably a little too early to talk about a mapping of informal apprenticeship. However, several avenues could be pursued. One could imagine a more systematic identification of employers who offer informal vocational training places, with a minimum collection of information (e.g., geographical location of the company, production(s), trades practised, years of entry and exit of apprentices). If a RPL system is set up, it could be coupled with a monitoring system: apprentices could be given a unique identification number that would make it possible to monitor them and thus better help them in the construction of their occupational project. In the same vein, if we are to ensure quality and know which passages in companies equip apprentices with

competences that will enable them to find a job or become self-employed, then it is important to know the performance of the graduates of informal apprenticeship on the labour market (job held and status, trade, competences used, etc.). These are the follow-up surveys for leavers of the informal system - preferably longitudinal - discussed in Section 4.3 (tracer studies).

All in all, good governance of the informal apprenticeship system requires good identification of employers' expectations and labour market needs. However, it is not necessarily required to ask employers: a good knowledge of the detailed levels of recruitment by trade and geographical area provides just as much information on the promising economic sectors as a survey of employers; even more as employers often find it difficult to express their needs.

## 8. QUALITY

Quality is a major issue in informal apprenticeship, because it is the quality of this learning that will determine the reality and level of competences created and the recognition of these competences and of any certificates issued. The task is both difficult and simple. It is difficult as talking about quality assurance in informal apprenticeship seems premature. Fieldwork in all the countries concerned shows that stakeholders are not ready to hear such a discourse, which is often highly formatted and unrealistic; for example, because quality assurance requires stakeholders to be extremely proactive. In summary, the task of implementing quality assurance is difficult.

This is because there is little reason to believe that informal apprenticeship is so specific that it cannot draw on, or even be directly inspired by, the work on quality assurance in the general context of apprenticeship as such. Still, concerning the sector-specific acquisition of competences - formal or informal, secondary or higher education - apprenticeships must create competences and facilitate the social and occupational integration of young people, especially those in the initial integration phase. The corresponding learning outcomes must be assessed, validated and certified. In fact, the issues are the same. It is only the methods of acquiring competences, i.e., at a very early stage, that changes. This section proposes elements for thinking about the quality assurance system, even if it is for the medium term.

### 8.1 Quality issues of Informal apprenticeship

Customer pressure is one of the reasons that can and should push the informal apprenticeship system to improve the quality of learning, and the reality of the competences that apprentices are expected to possess. Indeed, customers demand quality in both products and services. This has undoubtedly been a driving force in the introduction of assessment of learning outcomes in general (ILO, 2015).

In the case of informal apprenticeship, the stakes are particularly high because failure to prevent problems may deter employers from recruiting apprentices from informal apprenticeship. If employers realise that customers expect quality and that they are unable to provide it because their apprentice(s) lack competences, then there is a risk that they

will develop a bad reputation and that this will eventually taint the whole profession.

One solution is therefore to maintain a high level of competences, and to assess them regularly. This is a double-edged sword, however, as employers may no longer assign customer-facing production tasks to apprentices who have not been identified as having all the necessary competences.

It is therefore risky to develop assessment without developing the quality of informal apprenticeship at the same time.

## **8.2 Needs analysis – A convincing and shared feasibility study**

Ideally, competences are created to meet the needs of a territory or the populations that inhabit it, usually both. This requires a diagnosis of the competences that need to be developed to enable informal vocational training graduates to increase their employability, find a job, or create their own business. This is usually consensual.

This diagnosis, or definition of learning objectives (opportunity study), must also be shared with the various stakeholders. This point is less consensual. Its importance is sometimes denied, and the argument is put forward that the level of competences of employers - or the little time they have for this purpose - does not allow them to identify their needs, not to mention those of their sector of activity in general. While the argument that employers find it difficult to articulate their competences needs is sometimes heard, the fact remains that employers are at the heart of the production system. It is therefore essential to involve them in the diagnosis, otherwise there is a real risk that it will be biased towards the viewpoint of teachers, for example, or other experts.

## **8.3 Learning objectives are defined**

Defining clear learning objectives before the start of the learning process allows for the mobilisation of stakeholders towards these objectives, the motivation of learners, and the possibility of assessment, since it is precisely the achievement of these learning objectives that needs to be assessed during and/or at the end of the learning process. It is also a prerequisite for setting up a quality assurance system, since a quality approach aims to

ensure that these learning objectives are achieved in the best possible conditions.

This step also provides an opportunity to clearly indicate the generic competences, and the more specific ones that are to be developed through informal apprenticeship.

Finally, it is an opportunity to evaluate the employability potential of the competences in question: does mastering them really, and significantly, increase the probability of finding a job (employability)?

This step of defining learning objectives should take place at the beginning of the informal apprenticeship period. The objectives can even be part of the contract between the master and the apprentice. They can be verified by means of a competences portfolio, for example, which allows a third party to check that these objectives have been achieved.

This example is interesting because it shows that an assessment can use tools common to RPL without being RPL. A competences portfolio is an interesting tool and offers a method to assess the learning outcomes of apprentices.

## 8.4 A relevant learning outcomes assessment programme

Once the opportunity study is convincing - there is a need in the labour market that is identified; informal apprenticeship meets this need - and the learning objectives are clear, it is possible to move on to another essential step in a quality assurance process, that of assessing learning outcomes. All these steps depend on each other as this section will now show.

Here again, several elements are important to consider. First of all, and this may surprise the observer used to the formal system of apprenticeship, the development of the assessment method must take place just after the analysis of the work situations and the definition of the learning objectives (the opportunity study), before moving on to the development of the curriculum that will allow these objectives to be achieved. The insertion of the work of developing the assessment method between the analysis of the work situations and the drafting of the training programme is purposely proposed to keep

the needs of the labour market in mind when designing the assessment process, and to involve employers as much as possible in the assessment process. After all, they are the primary users of the competences created during the informal occupational learning process.

To be clear, if we go directly from the analysis of work situations to the drafting of the training program, we lose sight of the labour market, employers and their needs; we lose sight of the essentials for a system whose *raison d'être* is, after all, preparation for the labour market, for the direct practice of a trade. It should come as no surprise that employers continue to have serious concerns about the quality of the preparation of apprentices for the labour market and the expectations of employers.

In any case, in the case of informal apprenticeship, there is no real curriculum in practice, and the debate can be closed quite quickly about the sequence of the different steps in the quality assurance process if there is no explicit programme to follow. Assessment, on the other hand, is paramount. It is the essential component of the quality assurance process. In this sense, the conceptual proximity between the assessment of learning outcomes in the informal apprenticeship system and RPL is clear. In both cases, it is the assessment that gives credibility to the system and, of course, employers play a central role, which gives these two systems great potential for occupational integration through the creation and/or recognition of competences in demand.

Finally, to return to quality assurance more specifically, it is essential that trainers and assessors are not the same - like in the RPL, coaches and assessors cannot be the same, or like in the formal education and training system, teachers and assessors should not be the same. In all these cases, it is a question of ensuring that no stakeholder can be both judge and jury.

## 8.5 Quality Assurance Manual

All in all, this reflection should lead to the drafting and distribution of a quality assurance manual. It is difficult to give the exact content. It would be worthwhile to work in the field with professionals before drafting it. However, it is possible to perceive its outlines. It

should provide an analysis of the value of RPL if there are no procedures in place for the assessment of learning outcomes.

It must insist on the characteristics of the evaluator, who cannot be the employer to preserve equity. It must advocate the use of instruments such as training standards and qualification standards. It can recommend a precise contract on the duration with the employer and for the apprenticeship to be established. It can also address the nature and duration of apprenticeships organised in vocational training centres, for theoretical knowledge. Statistical surveys of informal vocational training graduates (tracer studies) can be used as a safeguard against evaluations dictated by personal interests. Indeed, if a large proportion of the graduates who have passed through the same trainer and/or the same employer in the informal economy are successful on the labour market and integrate quickly and under good conditions, the quality of informal vocational training cannot be questioned. On the other hand, if the labour market integration is difficult, the quality of the apprenticeship can be questioned.

However, many avenues for ensuring quality through inputs have been tried many times, but rarely succeeded. Ex-ante constraints can be imposed, such as: the competences of the actual learning master; his or her level of qualification; the nature, modernity and working condition of the machine tools and instruments; and the amount of time in the workplace devoted to learning. All of these conditions can still be proposed, but none of them, alone or in combination, will ever guarantee an effective transfer of competences to apprentices; hence the proposal for an end-of-pipe approach, by observing the performance of leavers/ graduates in the labour market (Section 4.3).

## 9. INFORMAL APPRENTICESHIP – AN EFFECTIVE AND EFFICIENT SYSTEM

### 9.1 An effective system

Informal apprenticeship is probably not consensual, even if different diagnoses converge (ILO, 2012; Teal, 2020). The fact remains that it has the merit of existing. It is effective simply because there are no credible alternatives. For many young people in many countries, it is informal apprenticeship or idleness. Solutions in the formal TVET system are not accessible to them, quite often for reasons of distance, or resources. Distance is a problem that has no easy solution. Countries such as Morocco are trying to deconcentrate the provision of learning solutions for rural and remote areas. The Office for Vocational Training and the Promotion of Work (OFPPT) is promoting the installation of micro training centres in the Orientale, and three training buses in the Beni Mellal Khénifra Region. At the same time, Morocco is building a Cité des métiers et des compétences (CMC) per region - twelve in all - to accommodate thousands of learners by 2022, for the first CMCs. Both approaches have their merits and are complementary. From this point of view, Haiti undoubtedly represents an extreme with a very high concentration of vocational training solutions - and in particular two very large centres - in the capital. In terms of resource-related access difficulties, the International Labour Office reports that empirical work on informal apprenticeship has shown that longer apprenticeship durations can allow employers to demand lower financial contributions from apprentices, thereby providing access to young people from very disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds (ILO, 2012).

The informal apprenticeship system is effective, therefore, because it achieves objectives - particularly quantitative ones - in terms of creating competences among young people. The argument is less clear in terms of recognition, since few apprentices are assessed and/or certified in informal apprenticeship. The argument is debatable because, if there are no qualifications issued, the societal recognition could be that graduates of informal apprenticeship can use their period in the company to justify their competences.



## 9.2 An efficient system

Informal apprenticeship is also efficient. It allows large numbers of apprentices to have access to tools and labour at no cost to the TVET authorities; an argument also developed by the International Labour Office (ILO, 2012). Most countries involved in informal apprenticeship would probably be unable to equip the corresponding number of vocational training centres; especially judging by the state of teaching materials in many vocational training centres in sub-Saharan Africa typically. The informal apprenticeship system thus achieves its objectives at relatively little or no cost to the state. Savadogo and Walther (2010) show, for Burkina Faso, that of the three vocational training systems - centre-based, dual apprenticeship, or informal apprenticeship - the informal apprenticeship system is clearly the most cost-effective for the government.

The informal apprenticeship system is efficient because it has developed a capacity to create competences at a cost that is not a deterrent; essentially because the machines and tools are already present in the enterprise. If the informal apprenticeship system is able to develop a system of RPL to deliver qualifications, then efficiency will be greatly enhanced given the relatively low cost of the RPL approach. To be clear, it is the word “relatively” that is important: RPL is not free - as is sometimes wrongly claimed - it is not even always cheap. On the other hand, it is always much cheaper than the traditional formal training approach.

## 9.3 The competence is social

To understand the effectiveness and efficiency arguments posed above, one might ask, for example, what would be the cost to the state of substituting informal apprenticeship and building the number of vocational training centres that would be required?

Alternatively, i.e., without going to such extremes, we can also ask the question of financing employers who receive apprentices. One idea would be to finance them, most probably in kind, by providing tools and raw materials, in exchange for which a contract would be drawn up, written or oral, provided that its application can be verified: again, through assessing the performance of the leavers (their integration into the labour market for example). This contract should not be too restrictive - in the spirit of informal apprenticeship - but should ensure that there are positive effects for the apprentice. For

example, it is possible to imagine that time could be explicitly set aside, during working hours, for training activities in the strict sense of the term; for example, to discover aspects of the trade that are still unknown, aspects that do not directly enter into the apprentice's daily tasks and activities. It is also possible to imagine that tasks not directly related to the trade are minimised in the apprentice's work programme (running errands for the employer, looking after the employer's children, various household tasks). These should not be eliminated, as a spirit of mutual aid must be maintained. Nevertheless, putting competences acquisition back at the centre of informal apprenticeship is a priority. Finally, it is possible to imagine financing the acquisition of new competences, and/or the updating of competences, for the master trainer or master craftsman.

Such funding for employers - if it is properly framed so that apprentices can benefit from it in part - would undoubtedly make it possible to change the logic and increase the supply of informal vocational training places. It is a question of reversing the logic of the apprentice as a cheap worker, to see him/her rather as capable of making a real contribution to the profitability of the company. Through the effects of reputation, the employer can only be a winner, as opposed to a situation where the apprentice, because he is poorly trained and not very involved in his everyday work, makes a low quality contribution to the company's collective work. This is a dimension that studies on these subjects often neglect: the competence is social. That is to say that the competence can only be exercised in a context, in a group, here with colleagues. This is also why competence can only be assessed, and even described, if the context is provided.

Indeed, it is also a fundamental part of the contract between the employer and the apprentice that the employer trains the apprentice in return for their work, both during the apprenticeship and often somewhat afterwards. This commitment of the apprentice to contribute to the profitability of the company is a theme that is not sufficiently addressed in the work on informal apprenticeship.

For completeness, there are cases where financing apprentices - instead of employers - may be relevant. For example, the World Bank worked on financing apprentices in Côte d'Ivoire in 2018-2019. The diagnosis had indeed shown that it was the demand that was rationed: the demand for apprenticeship places was low because the remuneration offered was too low. Thus, by funding apprentices, the number of apprenticeship places has increased.

## 9.4 Funding targets for employers

If fully immersed in his apprenticeship company, an apprentice can only benefit fully from his apprenticeship. The employer - undoubtedly the key player in the system - must therefore be motivated to get involved, to play his role, and thus to pass on competences to the apprentice or have them passed on. This requires incentives, and therefore partly by funding, which is accompanied by incentives for employers to actually help their apprentices achieve acceptable levels of competences. Moreover, it is a win-win situation, since the increase in competences will lead to a better reputation and more customers.

This funding should:

- Facilitate the acquisition of theoretical knowledge (according to the dual model without pushing the logic of duality to its limits);
- Promote placements with employers who are a priori competitors (through professional federations, employer groups, guilds and other networks);
- Encourage the use of training standards (with pedagogical progression, with passage through the vocational training centre at times that are not too restrictive for employers and apprentices);
- Promote also the use of qualification standards if necessary (for the delivery of a qualification, possibly by RPL);
- Promote the objective of certification of competences and the delivery of the corresponding qualification;
- Adjust the length of the informal vocational training period to the real needs of the apprentice while respecting the employer's profitability objectives;
- Promote access to training and/or validation of the experience of master apprentices or master craftspersons; and
- Set up a follow-up of school leavers on the labour market (in-depth statistical surveys on a sample and/or census with a lighter questionnaire, i.e., follow-up and evaluation) because the employer is best placed to gather information to contact school leavers at a 9- or 18-month horizon.

At the risk of repetition, the solution to improving informal apprenticeship can only be holistic. Taking the issues in isolation from each other is a self-defeating approach because of the interconnectedness of the different stages of informal apprenticeship and the quality assurance process.

The solution must also be progressive and not overload the system. It could be counterproductive to try to go too fast, especially if it generates additional administrative work for the employer.

## **9.5 RPL for positioning and access**

The validation of acquired experience, mentioned several times in this Guiding Note, also has the merit of enabling the positioning of future apprentices - on entry into informal vocational training therefore - in terms of competences. A light RPL approach could make it possible to identify the competences that the future apprentice possesses in order to position him or her on a learning path for the competences that he or she really needs.

Generally speaking, RPL is intended to shorten training courses, so it might as well be used as much as possible in informal vocational training, where access to training, and its duration, are major problems.

Candidates for RPL could finally benefit from a scholarship. There are several studies that indicate that such a scholarship can lead to more investment in their work by young people, and thus a greater mastery of competences. In Uganda, such scholarships even lead to higher wages once in the labour market (Teal, 2020).

## **9.6 Lifelong learning and competence blocks for access**

The field surveys reported in Section 5 show that the total durations of informal apprenticeship are poorly framed. One respondent even reported that informal apprenticeship can last up to ten years. It is not realistic to imagine forcing a young person to stay in apprenticeship for ten years. Even though this is probably a marginal case, it remains true that a (too) long apprenticeship can have negative consequences for the young people who cannot become autonomous and achieve economic independence, and also for the system since it prevents the renewal of apprentices.

One way of thinking about this would be to put lifelong learning back at the centre of the approach. This would involve organising periods of informal apprenticeship that are much shorter - six months, for example - but recurrent, every two, three or five years.

Fieldwork shows that young people who enter the workforce after three or four years of apprenticeship only use some of the competences that the trade normally requires. It is therefore undoubtedly more appropriate to prepare them to practise only part of the trade, so that they can be integrated quickly and have an income. It would then be necessary to offer them regular additional training, still in the informal vocational training system, in several stages. This would enable apprentices to master all the competences of their trade over a period of six to ten years, but in an ad hoc manner. This is the true meaning of lifelong learning. The blocks of competences approach mentioned above allows this kind of construction, since they must be designed to be acquired and evaluated independently and correspond to real employability.

Another obvious advantage is that the apprentice could be hosted by different employers. Rotation through several jobs, in several companies, would be established by definition of the approach.

## 10. WAYS FORWARD – A STRONG NEED FOR SOCIAL ENGINEERING IN THE FIELD AN EFFECTIVE AND EFFICIENT SYSTEM

Informal apprenticeship can legitimately be seen as a real system of competence creation. It is organised, even if the forms of organisation are often incomplete and vary from one country to another. However, it has the merit of offering a training solution to many young people who might not have access to other alternatives, for academic, financial and/or geographical reasons. The informal apprenticeship system is one of the most inclusive in the world of education and training. It also has the intrinsic properties of all training systems that put learners - who are also apprentices in this case - in direct contact with the labour market. It offers an extremely concrete preparation. Most criticisms that have been levelled at it concern this last aspect. The preparation is often only concrete and practical. It does not propose the acquisition of knowledge - knowledge specific to the trade, of course, nor academic knowledge - which would make the apprentices more adaptable, more autonomous and more occupationally mobile. The mastery of the theoretical background of one's trade allows for future occupational development. Moreover, even in the concrete and practical dimension, it is often the case that not all the competences of the intended trade are covered. Without practising all dimensions of their future occupation, apprentices in the informal vocational training system may not have all the competences to practice their [future] occupation independently, which may prevent them from leaving the apprenticeship status and entering wage employment or self-employment.

In total, then, improving the informal apprenticeship system involves the six dimensions already identified by the International Labour Office (ILO, 2017) as critical dimensions of success:

- the establishment of a social dialogue,
- the development of a regulatory framework,
- clear definition of the roles and responsibilities of stakeholders,
- equitable funding mechanisms,
- a strong capacity to meet labour market needs, and
- the opening of the system to all.

Providing guidance on how to help the informal apprenticeship system do what it sometimes already does well is complex as there are many variations from country to country. Again, there is a cultural dimension to this. Some countries, such as Mauritania and Tanzania, are making good progress in introducing RPL for the assessment and response to labour market needs, and in involving sectoral associations. Malawi, which has had a RPL-like system for decades, has modernised its approach and is also in the process of introducing RPL. However, informal apprenticeship has received a lot of attention in recent years, following the landmark work of the International Labour Organization. The World Bank has also been more active in this field in recent years.

Some of these six dimensions are being improved. To go further requires good social engineering, i.e., finding institutional spaces where all actors and other stakeholders can work together and contribute in their respective fields. Setting up social engineering means devising a non-binding way for actors and other stakeholders to work together. In order to create this interest, or even the necessary excitement, the approach must be win-win. It is only by demonstrating the value of this joint work that it will be put in place. For the time being, the main actors and stakeholders meet, exchange ideas - that is not the problem - but they then return to their comfort zone, to the sphere in which they are decision-makers, and any promising avenues identified collectively are not followed up, even if they are consensual and relevant.

It takes good social engineering to collect relevant data that can directly inform decision-making. There are two types of data. There is a need for management data, so to speak, that records informal apprenticeship activities. This would be a simple tracking of apprentices in a company (some biographical information, trade and/or qualification sought, dates). It would also be necessary to carry out follow-up surveys of graduates, so that the creation of competences can be evaluated in terms of performance on the labour market, the only real criterion for evaluating the quality of training. Governance through qualification is difficult to put in place, but it offers promising avenues of work, for example in terms of funding. Once follow-up surveys show that all graduates of informal vocational training from a given employer find a job under good conditions, it is easy to justify funding for that employer, for example for machine tools, instruments and/or labour, to help the employer do better and perhaps on a larger scale what the survey will have shown he is already doing very well.

Social engineering is also needed to set up a classic system of assessment of the apprentices' learning achievements and/or validation of the experience gained, for the apprentices and their employer and/or apprenticeship master. A good dose of social engineering is needed to organise the rotation of apprentices between several companies to enable them to cover the whole spectrum of competences needed to practise their [future] trade in total autonomy. This journey could result in the issuance of a passport, or even an e-passport, and this is clearly within the historical approach to apprenticeship and companionship (see a justification of this approach for the mastery and dissemination of multiple and innovative competences in ILO, 2012).

Quality social engineering is also a necessary condition for getting **the world of work**, and employers in particular, to become involved in the design and purpose of the informal apprenticeship system; for them to become involved in the assessment of apprentices, in the development and effective use of curricula. This also requires pedagogy with education stakeholders who often see the company only as a source of apprenticeship places, and who must agree to involve employers well beyond the provision of apprenticeship places. Involving employers can also open up informal apprenticeship to other occupations and qualifications. The most obvious example is the need to open up informal apprenticeship to occupations traditionally carried out by women, although an even more effective solution would be for employers to recruit women into so-called male occupations. That said, both options should be pursued. A typical example of what a win-win approach could be in this context is given by RPL: it would consist in validating the learning outcomes of apprentices in informal vocational training, and also those of employers and/or masters. Typically, the apprentice would aim for the first or second level of the national qualification framework from bottom up (a certificate of vocational aptitude, for example) and his or her employer would aim for the third or fourth level of the same framework (for example, a certificate of higher technician).

This social engineering must also involve the **world of education and training** to the greatest extent. Teachers must work on the elaboration and effective use of curricula which could then be developed in common, for a perfect comparability of the qualifications obtained in the formal and informal systems. This would allow for a reflection on the expectations of employers. Again, it is not yet a question of developing a real prospective work, but of trying to detect the expected competences even if they are not necessarily clearly verbalised by the actors of the labour market. The right mix of



academic knowledge, job-specific knowledge, practical/technical competences and cross-cutting competences has not yet been found anywhere, and the task is immense. The joint development of curricula can lead to the implementation of modern tools, which are all the more relevant and effectively used if they are developed collectively. This may involve digital tools, which would kill two birds with one stone: introducing digitisation for the very concrete and immediate purpose of disseminating knowledge to complement the learning of technical competences in the workplace; and also to move forward in general. Digitalisation is relevant to RPL, for example (electronic portfolio of competences, assessment based on videos). This line of work is based on the assumption already made above that young people are all equipped with a smart phone. In any case, experiments in access to learning to write (literacy) have produced good results. Incidentally, this work in informal apprenticeship has the potential to feed back into the entire TVET system. Involving the education and training community could also allow for the development and implementation of an entrepreneurship module that would have many potentials in many contexts. Finally, given the findings that show that apprentices with a high level of academic achievement do not necessarily succeed in earning incomes commensurate with their level in the labour market (Teal, 2020), it may be more relevant to educate apprentices in the informal apprenticeship system than to bring in young people with a high level of academic achievement, at least in the medium term.

Work on **qualifications** (national, sectoral or regional qualifications frameworks, and qualifications catalogue/directory) has shown that qualifications are situated between the world of work and the world of education and training (OECD, 2007). Qualification is a tool for linking the training system to the world of work. Owning a particular qualification may be one of the criteria for occupying a job. Issuing a qualification to the apprentice - and thus assessing his learning achievements - is of major interest on several levels. It is proof of competences, and therefore a major component of employability. It is often requested by employers in the formal sector of the economy when recruiting. As the same competences are of interest to the employer recruiting an employee and to the customer looking for a self-employed person, it allows to "travel" on the labour market. If the qualification is delivered by a competent and recognised authority, it benefits from a strong societal recognition that allows access to salaried employment, self-employment and a decent salary. It is therefore necessarily also of interest to the employer, as proposed above (Section 6.2.4). In any case, this requires developing or strengthening the culture

of assessment, not in the sense of punishment, an approach wrongly used in the world of education, but in the sense of ensuring that qualification is a mirror of competence, and not a social marker. Finally, better assessment - and therefore allowing time for assessment in working hours - can also create positive effects as it will increase the reputation of the company.

Between the world of education and the world of work there is also educational and vocational **guidance**, in the broadest sense (career guidance). In a very pragmatic way, it is difficult to imagine that collecting the needs of the labour market and matching them with a supply of informal vocational training places is relevant if the approach is not accompanied by a real guidance system, with professionals trained for the purpose. Indeed, it is not because needs are identified in terms of occupations that young people will choose these occupations, if only because they do not always, or never, have the information. Furthermore, having a real guidance approach, with listening to young people and support in building their project, can lead to higher levels of individual motivation and therefore better mastered competences. In the same vein, in a section on possible ways forward, it is difficult not to imagine the development of a **communication strategy**. It could be developed in several versions to reach different target audiences, especially those who are far from learning, both literally and figuratively. This would be an opportunity to use and disseminate a common language that is adapted and decided collectively. The social engineering proposed should also make it possible to bring all the partners into line by developing a common language (the Kafaât Liljamia project implemented by the British Council in the regions of Tangiers-Tetouan-Al Hoceima and Orientale in Morocco shows the importance of this type of result). An effective communication strategy can, for example, rely on ambassadors, apprentices or employers, who have been successful through informal apprenticeship. It may also be possible to involve one or more vocational training centre(s) in the ambassador programme, which may have contributed to the development of curricula, or to set up online courses for non-manual competences acquisition (on smart phones and/or electronic platforms). Mobile literacy courses have shown the many advantages of such an approach. It should be fairly easy to also attract attention and engage learners by communicating the value of an electronic portfolio of competences, on their phone. Without going that far, for example if the local technological level does not follow, a "professional travel diary" can also raise interest. It would allow young people to communicate their competences, provided that employers recognise it, and here again we

see the interest of good social engineering. Finally, this somewhat global communication strategy can be coupled with more specific interventions, adapted to the local economic fabric - with meetings between employers, apprenticeship masters and potential apprentices - again on a regional scale; by mobilising, for example, the Public Employment Service network.

**Informal apprenticeship cannot avoid building this social engineering. In other words, international organisations cannot be the sole driving force behind informal apprenticeship for long. To move it forward, actors and other stakeholders must be involved at the grassroots level.**

The adoption of a real vision for informal apprenticeship, the implementation of a holistic approach through social engineering that would show that the exercise is win-win, requires the mobilisation of **collective intelligence** to act. We are at the end of the diagnosis. We must move forward on the ground.

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