

## Talkshow Summary: *Apprenticeships in Asia-Pacific* (June 2012, Bangkok)

June 2012, Talkshow #7

Moderator: Ms Sophy Fisher (ILO Senior Communication and Public Information Officer)

Participants: Ms Marie Persson (Skills Australia); Ms Carmela Torres (ILO Senior Skills and Employability Specialist) and Mr Matthieu Cognac (ILO Youth Employment Specialist).

Callers: Mr Jaimes Alick (Australian welding apprentice); Mr Patrick Stadler (German electronics apprentice)

Camera, sound and editing: Mr Julian Hadden

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*This podcast is a co-production between the ILO's Asia-Pacific Youth Employment ([www.apyouthnet.ilo.org](http://www.apyouthnet.ilo.org)) and Skills and Employability Networks ([www.apskills.ilo.org](http://www.apskills.ilo.org))*



From left to right: Sophy Fisher, Matthieu Cognac, Carmela Torres © ILO

### **Question 1: What is an apprenticeship and how can apprenticeship systems prepare young people for the world of work?**

The first part of the discussion dealt with different concepts of apprenticeships and how these were linked to youth employment. Ms Torres explained that apprenticeships came in many forms and shapes but that they were essentially a practical and theoretical work-based kind of training which led to employable, recognized and mobile skills. Further, apprenticeships introduced young people to the world of work and improved their soft skills and attitudes towards work.

Mr Cognac stated that concepts of apprenticeship programmes varied from country to country. Some looked at it more in terms of training programmes, while others regarded apprenticeships primarily as a form of work experience. He further said that apprenticeships were often associated with traditional 'blue collar jobs' although there were now many apprenticeship systems in new industries such as those related to information and communications technologies (ICT). Moreover, apprenticeship programmes in Asia-Pacific existed in the public sector, for instance, the well-established government internship programmes in the Philippines and Pakistan. In more general terms, Mr Cognac stressed the importance of all kind of apprenticeships since they provided young job seekers with the right skills and attitudes to enter the job market. This was especially the case during the current times of economic crisis where young people were the 'last in and first out' and needed relevant skills and experience to compete with more experienced workers.

### **Question 2: What do apprenticeships look like in Australia?**

Ms Persson explained that apprenticeships and traineeships were offered across all industries in Australia. The key characteristic of the Australian apprenticeship system was that it existed within employment relations. Ms Persson further elaborated that apprenticeships were changing from traditional occupations towards older aged apprentices (the average age was currently 24) in increasingly high-tech industries such as ICT, finance, hospitality, tourism, community services and age care. One of the challenges of modern apprenticeships was that many did no longer operate on a master-apprentice relationship basis and that some apprentices were discouraged by the lack of mentoring at the workplace. Ms Persson stressed that successful apprenticeships were based on a partnership between the training provider, the employer, the industry and the employees. An additional challenge was constituted by the low completion rate of apprenticeships which currently stood at 48 per cent. Many of the drop-out apprentices left their apprenticeships early because of higher wages available to them, particularly in jobs related to Australia's ongoing resource boom.

Ms Torres added that sometimes the length of apprenticeships was an impediment to higher completion rates. Employers might have to rethink whether some skills could be taught in a shorter timeframe. Ms Torres explained that there were significant differences in the duration of apprenticeship programmes among countries in the region.

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The Philippines, for instance, offered apprenticeship programmes of three to six months while in Fiji (formal and informal) apprenticeships could last from one to four years.

An example of an Australian apprenticeship programme was given by Mr Alick, a former boiler making apprentice from Australia, who called in to talk about his apprenticeship experience. Mr Alick said that his apprenticeship with a Queensland based apprenticeship company lasted for around three and a half years of which 18 months were workshop based. His apprenticeship included a theoretical component taught in one to four week blocks at a Technical and Further Education (TAFE) college. Mr Alick said that after completing his apprenticeship he found it easy to get a well-paying job that matched his newly acquired qualification and that he pursued further certification as an international welding specialist.

Ms Persson then elaborated on the TAFE college. TAFEs played a vital role in the Australian technical and vocational education and training (TVET) system. The mostly government-funded colleges were particularly important for regional Australia as they guaranteed the ability to deliver adequate vocational training in remote and rural areas. TAFE courses could take place via distance learning and trainers also came to the work site to deliver training to smaller companies in remote areas.

### **Question 3: How could the Australian apprenticeship model be applied to less developed countries in our region?**

Ms Torres said that the issue of delivering quality training to remote areas was particularly relevant to many countries in Asia and the Pacific with large rural populations. Many rural communities had no access to training and the ILO supported approaches which brought training to communities and small enterprises through local training providers or non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

Mr Cognac added that the employment relation of Australian apprenticeships could be a model for other countries in the region where apprentices were sometimes regarded as unpaid trainees. Further, Mr Cognac stressed that companies should realize that they had something to gain from apprentices and that investing in apprenticeships was an investment in the company's future. He mentioned the importance of involving the tripartite partners in this process to ensure that apprentices were covered by basic labour rights and regulations.

The importance of social dialogue and tripartism for successful apprenticeship systems was supported by Mr Fahrurozi, Section Head of the Domestic Apprenticeship Program in the Ministry of Manpower and Transmigration of the Republic of Indonesia. Mr Fahrurozi had sent an email to the panel in which he explained the critical role of political commitment, policy coherence and strong social dialogue mechanisms among all stakeholders for designing and implementing apprenticeship systems. Mr Cognac added that Indonesia had developed very effective and efficient formal and informal apprenticeship programmes which were based on best practices from many other countries.

Ms Persson suggested that Australia had three key lessons for other developing countries. Firstly, successful apprenticeship programmes needed to involve the government as well as the social partners. Secondly, apprenticeship systems should be part of wider qualifications frameworks so that skills and competencies could be applicable across the country and sectors. Finally, existing skills should be recognized through a system of recognition of prior learning. Ms Torres added that some countries in the Asia-Pacific region were now looking into a regional qualifications framework, for instance, countries in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) were developing a model of skills recognition within the ASEAN community.

### **Question 4: What can be learned from the German apprenticeship 'success story'?**

Mr Stadler, a German mechanics apprentice, called in to share his apprenticeship experience. Mr Stadler said that he had undertaken a number of related internships during high school which helped him being selected for a highly competitive three year apprenticeship programme with one of Germany's leading companies for high-end domestic appliances. Mr Stadler told the panel that he shared his time between the work site and three days at a vocational school every other week.

Mr Cognac emphasized that countries in our region could learn from such apprenticeships as they played a critical role in facilitating a smooth school to work transition and provided young people with the necessary skills and knowledge about the world of work at an early age. Ms Torres explained that the close link between training institutions and industry as was the case for Germany was an important lesson for other countries in the Asia-Pacific region since it helped ensure that the curricula at vocational schools were relevant to industry requirements.