



**OECD Reviews of Vocational Education  
and Training**

# **Strengthening Apprenticeship in Scotland, United Kingdom**

**REPORT SUMMARY**





OECD Reviews of Vocational Education and Training

# **Strengthening Apprenticeship in Scotland, United Kingdom**

This work is published under the responsibility of the Secretary-General of the OECD. The opinions expressed and arguments employed herein do not necessarily reflect the official views of the Member countries of the OECD.

This document, as well as any data and map included herein, are without prejudice to the status of or sovereignty over any territory, to the delimitation of international frontiers and boundaries and to the name of any territory, city or area.

The statistical data for Israel are supplied by and under the responsibility of the relevant Israeli authorities. The use of such data by the OECD is without prejudice to the status of the Golan Heights, East Jerusalem and Israeli settlements in the West Bank under the terms of international law.

**This is an extract from:**

OECD (2022), *Strengthening Apprenticeship in Scotland, United Kingdom*, OECD Reviews of Vocational Education and Training, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/2db395dd-en>.

**Photo credits:** Cover © LituFalco/Fotolia.com; Peshkova/Shutterstock.com and Studio Folzer.

© OECD 2022

---

The use of this work, whether digital or print, is governed by the Terms and Conditions to be found at <https://www.oecd.org/termsandconditions>.

---

# Foreword

Global megatrends, such as automation, digitalisation, the green transition and population ageing, are bringing about structural changes in labour markets around the world. These changes have an impact on skills demand and supply. Apprenticeships can play a key role in responding to changing labour market needs by equipping young people and adults with the right skills.

The COVID-19 pandemic affected education systems around the world, with apprenticeships being particularly impacted due to the difficulty of accessing workplaces and organising practical learning online or in classrooms, under strict health and safety regulations. Moreover, the resulting economic downturn has limited the capacity of employers to provide work-based learning opportunities. Innovative solutions are needed to ensure that apprenticeship systems continue to deliver high-quality relevant training. The COVID-19 crisis has underlined the benefits and opportunities of the use of digital technologies in apprenticeships, but also brought some key challenges to light. At the same time, apprenticeship systems have a crucial role to play in the recovery by providing workers and jobseekers with relevant training opportunities and by developing the right skills for the future.

All these changes highlight the need for resilient apprenticeship systems. This is also the case in Scotland (United Kingdom) where structural changes in the labour market and associated changing skill needs highlight the need for a strong apprenticeship system. The system will need support to continue to provide high-quality learning opportunities and to foster innovation that could increase its efficiency, quality and attractiveness. In an era of changing skill needs, the role of employers is more crucial than ever before. Apprenticeships can and should be a valuable learning path for a diverse group of learners, but sufficient support is needed to make apprenticeship accessible for all.

The report “Strengthening apprenticeship in Scotland, United Kingdom” aims to support Scotland’s efforts to strengthen its apprenticeship system, by assessing the key challenges and opportunities it faces and providing international examples and policy recommendations on how to make the system more responsive, innovative and inclusive. The report is part of the OECD Centre for Skills’ broader work on *Facing the Future* in vocational education and training (VET), which supports countries in building strong and resilient VET systems.

The report was drafted by Shinyoung Jeon from the OECD Centre for Skills, and Simon Field as the author of the intermediate report *Strengthening Skills in Scotland*, under the supervision of Marieke Vandeweyer (manager of the VET team) and El Iza Mohamedou (Head of the OECD Centre for Skills). Simon Normandeau and Rodrigo Torres offered support for stakeholder interviews. The report has benefited from comments provided by Mark Pearson (Deputy-Director for Employment, Labour and Social Affairs). Administrative and editorial assistance was provided by Jennifer Cannon and Duniya Dedeayn from the OECD Centre for Skills and by Sally Hinchcliffe.

# Executive summary

The Scottish apprenticeship system has made remarkable progress, becoming one of the most flexible and wide-ranging systems in the OECD. Until the COVID-19 pandemic intervened, apprenticeship starts had risen 10% between 2013/14 and 2019/20. Modern Apprenticeships, the typical apprenticeship in Scotland, reach a broad group of learners, including those from more deprived backgrounds and adult learners, offering them a chance to upgrade their skills in a changing job market. With the introduction of Graduate Apprenticeships, apprentices can now gain a university degree, while new Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) level 4 and 5 customised awards offer work-based alternatives to pupils who might otherwise not have completed upper secondary education.

Outcomes have also been positive. Ninety percent of those completing their Modern Apprenticeship were in work six months later; employers reported that apprentices improved not just their technical skills but also their communication and teamwork – 21st century skills in increasing demand.

Despite this progress, Scotland's apprenticeship system will need to be strengthened if it is to help the economy close its growing skills gaps. It will need to be more responsive to employers' needs. Although employers take the lead in developing the frameworks and standards that underpin apprenticeships, not all play an equal role in apprenticeship design, and only 16% of employers take on any apprentices at all. Smaller employers – the backbone of the Scottish economy – are particularly under-represented in both areas. Because learning providers play a mediating role in determining the scale and mix of apprentice places, there is a danger that the system will be skewed towards the most cost-effective training rather than the training that is most needed by learners and employers. The Scottish Apprenticeship Advisory Board (SAAB) is therefore contributing to ensuring employers are given a leading role in the apprenticeship system, both in terms of design and delivery, to help make the system more responsive to changing skill needs.

The flexibility of the current system is its strength, but it also presents a risk. Scotland has some of the shortest apprenticeships among OECD countries, and some apprentices may receive no off-the-job training at all, posing possible challenges in terms of training quality. Setting certain minimum requirements could help strengthen the apprenticeship brand without losing much of the system's current flexibility.

Whether it is identifying potential apprentices and matching them to employers, or reducing the burden of assessment and accreditation, technology offers many ways to make apprenticeships systems more efficient and effective and hence more accessible to learners and employers alike. "Big data" can increasingly be harnessed to identify future skills needs, monitor the outcome of apprenticeships and even identify students at risk of dropping out. Robotics and virtual reality allow students a safer environment to master skills than would otherwise be feasible while assistive technology opens doors to students with disabilities. Scotland has strong innovation policies and has already made strides in developing online apprenticeships, virtual learning and e-portfolios but maximising these opportunities will rely on the capacity of the teaching and training workforce to turn strategies into practice. Strategic guidance and practical support can help in that respect.

As Scotland strengthens its apprenticeship system, it needs to ensure that no potential learners are left behind. Much progress has been made, including mainstreaming its “fair work” agenda and setting Apprenticeship Equality Action Plan, with some of the intended targets already being made. Despite the strong equity benefits apprenticeships offer, Scottish Government funding per student is less generous than for tertiary degrees, potentially reducing the number of places on offer and driving some learners into less suitable programmes. Although the flexibility of the current system makes it easy for workers with some experience to accelerate their apprenticeships, there is no clear route for those who already have almost all the skills they need to obtain a qualification directly. Nor are there clear routes for the sort of onward development found in other strong apprenticeship systems. In the German-speaking countries in Europe, this is partly addressed through the *Meister*, or “master craftsman” qualification, that allows qualified apprentices, often with work experience, to acquire higher-level professional skills, learn how to run their own business, and develop the skills to train apprentices themselves. *Meister* qualifications could equip successful apprentices in Scotland to develop further and help create a new generation of workers for Scotland’s future.

## Key policy recommendations

### ***Responsiveness with attention to quality***

- Strengthening the role of employers in the apprenticeship system.
- Building a more demand-led funding system for apprenticeships.
- Establishing minimum requirements in terms of the length, mix and trainers of apprenticeships.

### ***Innovation with strategic guidance***

- Further expanding and promoting apprenticeships by using technology and innovation.
- Innovating the assessment and monitoring of the outcomes of apprenticeships.
- Providing strategic guidance and practical support for innovation in apprenticeships.

### ***Inclusiveness and equity***

- Mainstreaming inclusion and equity.
- Developing a direct route to a final apprenticeship assessments and qualifications.
- Developing further learning opportunities for qualified apprentices.

# 1 Key insights and recommendations for the Scottish apprenticeship system

---

This section provides a brief description of the importance of investing in apprenticeships and an overview of the Scottish apprenticeship system. It then summarises the recommendations from the main report in three key areas: 1) strengthening the apprenticeship system to be more responsive; 2) innovating apprenticeships; and 3) making apprenticeships work for all.

---



## 1.1. Key insights on the Scottish apprenticeship system

Increasing the resilience of the Scottish economy will be key to the coming years, especially in light of the COVID-19 pandemic and global trends such as the green and digital transformation. This will require a continued commitment to increasing productivity and ensuring inclusive growth and fair work. Scotland's apprenticeship system has the potential to contribute to this task and help meet the challenges ahead, by building a solid foundation for the Scottish skills system. While the Scottish apprenticeship system has made remarkable progress in recent years, improvements could be made to increase its responsiveness, quality, innovation and inclusiveness. With the momentum created by the Scottish Government's new 10-year National Strategy for Economic Transformation, now is the time for Scotland to turn its attention to addressing these changes.

### ***The importance of apprenticeship in a changing labour market***

Scotland (United Kingdom) is experiencing changing demand for skills, a process that will only accelerate with digitalisation and automation, an ageing population, and the transition to a low-carbon economy. Changes in employment practices and declining employer support for training mean that training programmes like apprenticeships are increasingly important not just for youth but for adults needing to upgrade their skills.

Apprenticeships are an important driver of social inclusion in Scotland, especially for those from the most disadvantaged backgrounds. Not only do they provide good labour market outcomes for the young people who complete them, but their focus on work-based learning means they offer a good grounding in both the hard technical skills and the softer interpersonal skills that are increasingly in demand. Apprenticeships benefit employers, by cutting recruitment costs and potentially driving innovation. However, to reap those benefits, the apprenticeship system needs to offer high-quality training in the skills the labour market needs, and support employers to offer a wide range of apprenticeship places, especially as the economy recovers from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Annex of the main report provides further details of key trends shaping the apprenticeship system.

### ***The apprenticeship landscape in Scotland***

Scotland has expanded its apprenticeship system in recent years, developing new types of apprenticeship at different education levels: Modern Apprenticeships (MAs), Foundation Apprenticeships (FAs) and Graduate Apprenticeships (GAs). MAs are the "typical" apprenticeship: industry-designed programmes offering a mix of work and on-the-job training and (usually) off-the-job training, delivered mostly at SCQF levels 5 to 7 (i.e. broadly consistent with level 3 in the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED), or the upper secondary level) - although some higher-level MAs also exist. FAs, introduced in 2014, are a work-based learning option for upper secondary students, delivered alongside traditional school qualifications. GAs, launched in 2017, are employer-based four-year apprenticeship programmes that lead to a university degree. Modern and Graduate Apprentices are employees, with all the rights that status entails, but Foundation Apprentices are not. Apprenticeship outcomes are generally strong, and progress has been made on increasing the inclusiveness of the system. Until the COVID-19 crisis, apprenticeships were seeing rising numbers of starts, with GAs in particular expanding rapidly since their introduction (see Figure 1.1 below).

The governance of the apprenticeship system in Scotland is complex, with multiple stakeholders involved. The key bodies include (see Annex of the main report for a comprehensive list of actors):

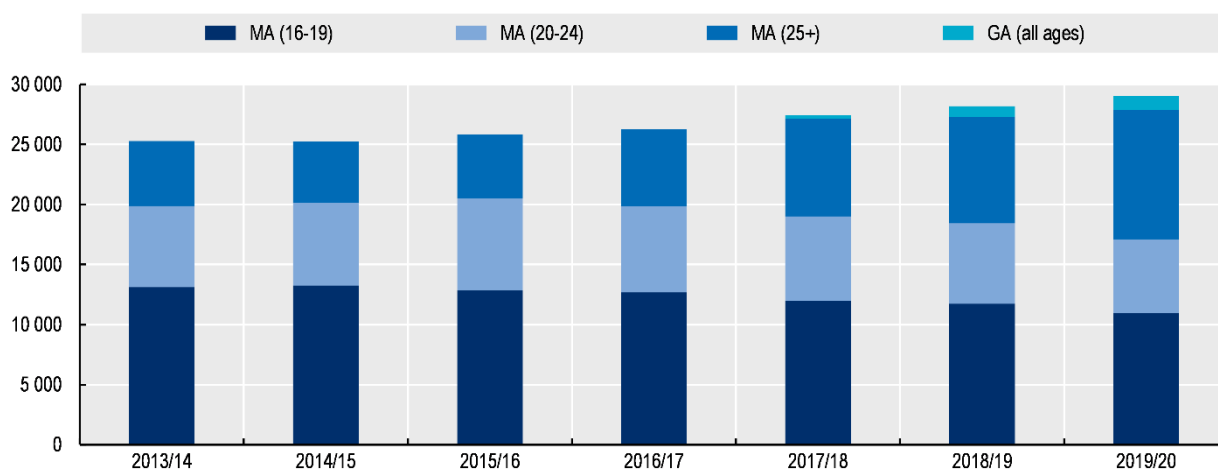
- Scottish Government, which sets policy, targets and budget for apprenticeships and provides skills agencies with guidance.
- Skills Development Scotland (SDS), which manages and funds the delivery of MAs.

- The Scottish Funding Council (SFC), whose main statutory function is to secure and fund coherent, high quality further and higher education by colleges and universities in Scotland including FAs<sup>1</sup> delivered in colleges and GAs.
- The Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) Accreditation which is the Scottish Qualifications regulator charged by Scottish Government to accredit and regulate the main qualification included in an MA and FA.
- The Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) Awarding Body which is responsible for developing, maintaining, and improving qualifications included in an MA or FA, and the quality assurance of education and training establishments which offer SQA qualifications.
- Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) Scotland which is responsible for monitoring the quality of GA delivery.
- Education Scotland who has been commissioned by the Scottish Government to undertake external reviews of the off-the-job and on-the-job training elements of Modern Apprenticeship (MA) programmes, within each of the industry sectors.
- The Scottish Apprenticeship Advisory Board (SAAB), which acts as the voice of employers in the system and set out the main principles underpinning apprenticeships, and the Apprenticeship Approval Group (AAG), a subgroup of SAAB, which ensures efficiency, coherence and quality assurance within the apprenticeship approval process.

The main supporting policy is Scotland's 2014 youth employment strategy, *Developing Scotland's Young Workforce*. Each occupation has an industry-specified apprenticeship framework, providing guidance on the content of apprenticeships within that occupation. Under the new apprenticeship development approach via Technical Expert Groups, apprenticeships will have standards defining the knowledge, skills and behaviours needed to achieve a given qualification level. Further details about the Scottish apprenticeship system are included in the Annex of the main report.

### Figure 1.1. Apprenticeship starts have increased in Scotland up until the COVID-19 pandemic

Evolution of apprenticeship starts



Source: SDS (2022<sup>[1]</sup>), Modern Apprenticeship Statistics Up to the end of quarter 3, 2021/22, <https://www.skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk/media/48909/modern-apprenticeship-statistics-quarter-3-2021-22.pdf>; SDS (2021<sup>[2]</sup>), Modern Apprenticeship Statistics - Up to the end of quarter 4, 2020/21, <https://www.skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk/media/48680/modern-apprenticeship-statistics-quarter-4-2020-21.pdf>.

### ***Challenges and opportunities related to responsiveness, innovation and inclusiveness***

Scotland has taken a number of steps to improve the governance of the apprenticeship system in an effort to make the system more responsive. Most notably, the Scottish Apprenticeship Advisory Board (SAAB) was established and has developed a set of 14 principles to help define apprenticeships more clearly. Although SAAB and other associated groups are employer-led bodies, in general, employers' active participation in the apprenticeship system is relatively limited, in particular among micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs). Although Scottish employers acknowledge the importance of work-based learning, only 16% of employers currently offer apprenticeships. This is comparable to other countries in the United Kingdom, but much lower than in leading apprenticeship countries such as Germany and Switzerland. SAAB has responsibility for strengthening employer engagement, including among those not represented by the main employer organisations, but has limited powers and lacks the capacity to give employers a leading role in the apprenticeship system. Moreover, there are few incentives to encourage employers to either offer apprenticeships or to get more involved in the governance of the apprenticeship system. In addition, the current funding system for modern apprenticeships in Scotland can give learning providers disproportionate influence over the mix and scale of places on offer, which could mean that the system partially reflects which apprenticeships are easy or cost-effective for the provider to offer, rather than what employers, trainees, or the overall economy needs. Chapter 2 of the main report describes these challenges in detail, as well as the actions taken in Scotland, international good practice examples, and detailed recommendations for making the apprenticeship system more responsive.

To further expand and strengthen the apprenticeship system, Scotland could make greater use of innovation and technology. Smarter use of data could help to align the apprenticeships on offer with current and future labour market needs, as well as identifying those young people and adults who would benefit most and making it easier to match potential apprentices to training places. More and better data can also facilitate the long-term monitoring of apprenticeship outcomes. New and emerging technologies could also improve the delivery of vocational training, including the use of virtual reality to allow students to develop practice-oriented skills, and advanced analytics to identify those learners at risk of dropping out, enabling early interventions. Innovations in assessment could also help with hard-to-measure skills and make it easier to manage the complex portfolios of evidence that apprentices, employers and learning providers need to keep track of. Such innovation works best when it is developed in partnership – with employers, trainers, awarding bodies and apprentices themselves, as well as technology companies and researchers. Scotland already has some interesting initiatives underway in this area which could be further developed and improved. Chapter 3 of the main report describes these opportunities and initiatives implemented in Scotland and other countries, together with detailed recommendations for innovating the Scottish apprenticeship system.

By allowing people to combine learning and earning, apprenticeships can be a powerful tool for improving inclusion and equity, whether it is helping young people make the transition to the world of work, or reskilling or upskilling workers. Making apprenticeships work for all means reducing barriers to accessing them through targeted support for different groups. Adults may have different needs and preferences to young learners. Scotland's flexible apprenticeships mean that it is easy to accelerate programmes for workers who already have some experience, but there is no route to allow the most highly skilled workers to bypass unnecessary training and gain an apprenticeship qualification directly. Moreover, there are no obvious routes for progression after completing an apprenticeship, with no equivalent to the "master craftsman" qualification that provides a structure for career development and lifelong learning in some apprenticeship systems. Making apprenticeship work for all also means ensuring that funding is equitable. Currently, Scotland's funding system disproportionately favours higher education over apprenticeships. While higher education is fully funded, employers have to bear some of the training costs involved in Modern Apprenticeships, especially for older adults. This may be reducing the number of apprenticeships available, leaving skill gaps that MAs would be otherwise well placed to fill. Chapter 4 of the main report

describes these challenges in detail, as well as the actions taken in Scotland, international good practice examples, and detailed recommendations for making the apprenticeship system more inclusive.

## 1.2. Key recommendations for strengthening the apprenticeship system

The main report provides detailed recommendations for Scotland to build a roadmap for the future apprenticeship system with the aim of shaping a solid foundation for expanding the provision of apprenticeships in the long term. A structured and systemic approach should be taken to implement the following recommendations as a coherent policy package. The recommendations are summarised below.

### ***Strengthen the apprenticeship system to be more responsive***

**Strengthen the role of employers in the apprenticeship system:** Scotland should encourage and support employers to play a more central role in the apprenticeship system. Employers that could benefit from apprenticeships, and particularly MSMEs, should be supported by well-designed incentives and other support mechanisms. This will improve their capacity to provide apprenticeships, and also encourage and support them to be involved in the entire process of design, development and assessment of apprenticeship programmes. Much progress has been made in involving employers in the Scottish apprenticeship system, including the establishment of SAAB and other employer-led groups. Nonetheless, SAAB could play a stronger role in employer engagement, particularly by scaling up its efforts to reach out to employers from different sectors and sizes, increasing co-ordination and co-operation with other relevant stakeholders, and improving apprenticeship governance. To achieve this, SAAB will require more support to increase its capacity and influence.

**Build a more demand-led apprenticeship system:** The scale and mix of apprenticeship provision should be driven by demand from employers and apprentices, while retaining an element of targeted funding to achieve strategic policy objectives. Such a demand-led approach would require an update or modification of the existing funding model to align it better with the needs of employers. Apprenticeship provision in Scotland has been mediated to some degree by learning providers, who may be biased towards those programmes which are easier and less costly to provide. In contrast, in many leading apprenticeship countries, provision is determined by demand from employers and learners. Such a demand-driven apprenticeship system would need to be supported by standards and frameworks that can be easily adapted to align with changing labour market needs, and a vocational teaching workforce with up-to-date technical skills.

**Establish minimum requirements for apprenticeships:** Scotland should define minimum requirements for apprenticeships to ensure quality without losing responsiveness and flexibility. Currently, Scotland sets no minimum requirements for the length of apprenticeship programmes or the proportion of off-the-job training. Such requirements could guarantee a certain level of training quality. There are also no specific requirements or training available for in-company trainers. All these elements need to be defined and agreed, while maintaining certain elements of flexibility such as recognition of prior learning or fast tracks for experienced workers to shorten training where appropriate.

### ***Innovate apprenticeships***

**Further expand and promote apprenticeships by using technology and innovation:** Scotland could engage more potential learners and employers and facilitate training through greater use of innovation. While Scotland is doing relatively well in the use of data analytics and online platforms to help match and connect potential apprentices and employers, it could do more to promote technology-enabled apprenticeships. When doing so, Scotland should build employers' technological capability, keep them strongly engaged in the development of systems, and help learning providers and trainers to find the right balance between in-person teaching and technology-enabled training. Using learner performance analytics

on progression and strengthening the pedagogical skills of teachers and trainers to make effective use of technology in apprenticeships can help in this area.

**Innovate the assessment and monitoring of apprenticeships:** Technology can offer more time- and cost-effective ways of assessing practice-oriented skills, helping to streamline the assessment process. Significant untapped potential remains in this area, however. For example, technology can help reduce the work of trainers and assessors by supporting assessment tasks and can be used to set up an apprentice skill and qualification management system. Blockchain technology and micro-credentials such as digital badges can also open new avenues for credentialing in apprenticeships. In terms of monitoring apprenticeship outcomes, Scotland made significant progress in using data to monitor both the education and labour market outcomes of apprentices, as well as the costs and benefits for employers, for example, through working on the Education and Skills Impact Framework. Scotland could go further by regularly monitoring longer-term outcomes, costs and benefits, and refining apprenticeship design and delivery based on the results. In addition, Scotland could monitor how technology is used in apprenticeships and how that use contributes to the improvement of the quality of apprenticeship.

**Provide strategic guidance and practical support for innovation in apprenticeships:** Scotland has developed several strategies that can help innovate Scottish apprenticeships. However, to translate these into practice, providers need strategic guidance and practical assistance and partnerships for apprenticeship innovation should be encouraged. Scotland could encourage education technology companies and developers to co-create with teachers, students and employers digital tools and materials for apprenticeships that are relevant, affordable, scalable, inter-operational and easy to use. Moreover, employers, training providers and research institutions should be encouraged to share knowledge, resources and tools on applying innovative approaches and available technology to apprentice training. Scotland can build on its ongoing efforts for the use of technology in apprenticeship delivery.

### ***Make apprenticeships work for all***

**Mainstream inclusion and equity:** Important steps have been taken to make apprenticeships more accessible by introducing SCQF Level 4 and 5 work-based learning, but more can be done to provide targeted support and fair funding for apprenticeships to make the system work for different groups. Synergies with existing policy packages can be exploited to support targeted groups of learners to participate in apprenticeships. Moreover, the partial subsidy approach to the Modern Apprenticeship funding (which mostly focuses on support for off-the-job training among individuals aged 16-19) is inconsistent with the full subsidy approach for higher education and off-the-job training in Foundation or Graduate Apprenticeships. Therefore, Scotland should provide fully-funded off-the-job training in all apprenticeships. This will contribute to the ongoing efforts of attracting a more diverse and inclusive group of learners to the apprenticeship system.

**Develop a direct route to final apprenticeship assessments and qualifications:** Although Scotland has well-established routes to accelerate apprenticeships for those with existing skills, there are very few options for direct access to an assessment leading to the same qualifications as those obtained through apprenticeship. Providing direct access to a final apprenticeship assessment and qualification can serve the needs of experienced workers who have acquired the necessary skills through non-formal and informal learning, and also migrants who have qualifications that may not be recognised.

**Develop higher-level vocational qualifications for qualified apprentices with aspirations for further learning:** Building on its successful experience of providing Graduate Apprenticeships at degree levels and Modern Apprenticeships at higher levels, as well as other countries' examples, Scotland should develop master craftsperson qualifications that allow qualified apprentices to acquire higher-level professional skills, learn how to run their own business and allow them to train apprentices of their own.

## Key policy recommendations

### Responsiveness

- Strengthening the role of employers in the apprenticeship system: Provide incentives and support for employers to engage in the system, particularly MSMEs; establish a legal framework for the apprenticeship system; and increase the capacity of SAAB to act as the voice of all employers in the system.
- Towards a more demand-led funding system for apprenticeships: Pilot and evaluate a demand-led system whereby the mix and number of apprenticeship places is set through labour market demand; offer incentives to employers providing apprenticeships meeting defined criteria; and update standards and frameworks to meet the changing requirements of the economy.
- Establishing minimum requirements for apprenticeship programmes: Review the general education content of apprenticeships; introduce minimum requirements for programme length and the amount of off-the-job training; define minimum requirements for in-company trainers; and rebrand the entire apprenticeship family as “Scottish Apprenticeships”.

### Innovation

- Using innovation to expand and promote apprenticeships: Make better use of labour market intelligence; develop techniques to help identify and match potential apprentices and employers; help employers evaluate their skills and training systems; promote the benefits and provide appropriate guidelines on the use of technology to learning providers and in-company trainers; and provide professional development to teachers and trainers.
- Innovating the assessment and monitoring of apprenticeships: Maximise the effective use of existing technology in assessment and certification; and refine apprenticeship instruments based on ongoing and future monitoring results.
- Providing strategic guidance and practical support for innovation in apprenticeships: Do more to translate national strategies into practical guidance and assistance; encourage learning providers and employers to develop innovation plans; and encourage collaboration and partnerships to create digital tools.

### Inclusion and equity

- Mainstreaming inclusion and equity: Ensure that the full range of apprenticeships are accessible to all; pilot and evaluate fully funding Modern Apprenticeships for all ages; and roll out to all sectors accordingly.
- Developing a direct route to a final apprenticeship assessments and qualifications: Clearly define a direct route to appropriate apprenticeship qualification; set the amount of work experience required; and designate a responsible body to administer the assessments.
- Developing further learning opportunities for qualified apprentices: In liaison with the Welsh Government, pilot the development of a master craftsperson qualification, and develop an appropriate funding model.

### Box 1.1. About the “Strengthening Apprenticeship in Scotland, United Kingdom” study

#### Objectives

The study aims to provide guidance to Scotland on how to strengthen its apprenticeship system in the face of changing labour market needs. Phase I (2019-20) of the study provided policy recommendations on how to design and implement high-quality resilient apprenticeships (Field, 2020<sup>[3]</sup>). Phase II (2021-22) drew out policy recommendations on how to strengthen the apprenticeship system in two areas: 1) strengthening the role of employers; and 2) making effective use of innovative technology in the delivery of apprenticeships. The main report synthesises all the policy recommendations from the two phases for building a responsive, innovative and inclusive apprenticeship system in Scotland.

#### Methodology

The study draws on Scotland’s data and stakeholders’ views as well as comparative data and the experiences of several OECD countries to distil policy messages. The information for the report was gathered through:

- **Data analysis and literature reviews:** Key data sources include publications and data produced by SDS the Scottish Government, the Scottish Employer Skills Survey (2020), Employer Perspective Survey (2019) and relevant international statistics.
- **Stakeholder interviews and workshops:** The OECD review team gathered inputs from remote bilateral interviews with stakeholders in Scotland, including SDS and SAAB, and other countries to explore future strategies to strengthening the apprenticeship system in Scotland. Inputs were also collected through workshops organised in collaboration with SDS.
- **Inputs and review by the Group of National Experts on VET (GNE-VET):** The OECD team gathered inputs from members of the GNE-VET through remote interviews and workshops, and written feedback.

#### Scope

The study focuses on apprenticeships at Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) Level 4-11 (i.e. International Standard Classification of Education Levels 2-7; or secondary and tertiary education).

## References

- Field, S. (2020), *Strengthening Skills in Scotland*, OECD, Paris, [3]  
[http://www.oecd.org/skills/centre-for-skills/Strengthening\\_Skills\\_in\\_Scotland.pdf](http://www.oecd.org/skills/centre-for-skills/Strengthening_Skills_in_Scotland.pdf).
- SDS (2022), *Modern Apprenticeship Statistics Up to the end of quarter 3, 2021/22*, [1]  
<https://www.skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk/media/48909/modern-apprenticeship-statistics-quarter-3-2021-22.pdf>.
- SDS (2021), *Modern Apprenticeship Statistics - Up to the end of quarter 4, 2020/21*, [2]  
<https://www.skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk/media/48680/modern-apprenticeship-statistics-quarter-4-2020-21.pdf>.

## Note

<sup>1</sup> Since 2021, the Scottish Funding Council took the responsibility of financing Foundation Apprenticeships that have college-based learning.



## **OECD Reviews of Vocational Education and Training**

# **Strengthening Apprenticeship in Scotland, United Kingdom**

### **REPORT SUMMARY**

Apprenticeship systems have a crucial role to play in providing students, workers and jobseekers with relevant training opportunities and developing the right skills for the future in responding to changing labour market needs. This report focuses on how to strengthen the apprenticeship system in Scotland (United Kingdom). The Scottish apprenticeship system has made remarkable progress, becoming one of the most flexible and wide ranging systems in the OECD. Apprenticeship starts are on the rise and outcomes have been positive. Informed by international evidence, this report identifies strategies to make the system more responsive, innovative and inclusive. These include strengthened employer engagement, refined minimum requirements for programmes, strategic guidance and practical support for innovation in apprenticeships, and efforts to make the system more accessible and relevant so as to promote inclusion and equity.