

Trade Union  
Advisory Committee  
to the OECD  
*Commission  
syndicale consultative  
auprès de l'OCDE*

# Unions & Skills II

*Why social dialogue  
and collective bargaining  
matter for skills systems  
and training provision*

PARIS, 11 FEBRUARY 2020



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### **ABOUT THIS PAPER**

The paper was authored by the TUAC Secretariat (Anna Byhovskaya, Senior Policy Advisor with the help of Abraham Collier, Junior Policy Consultant). It benefited greatly from case studies and inputs from TUAC affiliates and partners. A draft version was discussed at the TUAC Working Group on Education, Training and Employment Policy in September 2019 and was circulated for comments and inputs.



# Introduction & main take-aways

**M**odern labour markets require initial quality training and the continuous access to up- and re-skilling. Policy debates put this as the first go-to solution for the Future of Work. And yet, the reality is that skills gaps and mismatches persist; public education and training systems are chronically underfunded; and entire population groups are falling behind with insufficient incentives or opportunities to re- or up-skill.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has been very vocal on the urgent need to prepare current systems for a ‘massive training challenge’. The “*skills, skills, skills*” mantra is heard across the organisation’s hallways (and beyond) when wanting to deal with digitalisation and the inequalities of income or opportunity. Yet, the OECD would give limited recognition to the roles of labour market institutions, of collective bargaining and of pro-active trade union strategies in training design, governance and provision. Recent OECD outputs have put more emphasis on social partnerships. A more granular look as to what it means, would help drive the policy debate forward: [Social partnership is intrinsic to accessible and effective training provision](#).

The first TUAC discussion paper ‘Union & Skills’ (2016) described ways in which trade unions support skills development. This new edition provides an update and takes it further with new case studies and a typology of trade union activities (and the potential thereof) in skills ecosystems. The typology showcases trade union involvement:

- in the continuous development of skills policies, as members of national, sectoral or local oversight bodies, and in the design of training and accreditation frameworks;

- in setting standards for training and VET programmes—including on access, remuneration and programme content (also via collective agreements);
- and as direct training providers or points of contact for workers seeking guidance on career progression.

In striving to fill in the gaps and to create an evidence base, the paper presents case studies from [Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Chile, Denmark, France, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Japan, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, and the UK \(England and Scotland\)](#), building on contributions of TUAC members and partners. It further discusses the potential of training clauses in Global Framework Agreements (GFAs) between globally operating Multinational Enterprises and Global Trade Union Confederations.

The paper makes the case of unions as essential partners in times when new occupational needs emerge due to digital and green economy needs. In a future world of work, lifelong learning systems need an overhaul and workers would benefit from a statutory right to paid time off to learn, in a form appropriate to the country system. Employers also need to be incentivised. A poll of business leaders has shown that while they want workers to be prepared for Artificial Intelligence (AI), “*only 3% were reinvesting in training*”. In this equation, especially vulnerable workers might fall further behind. Collective bargaining, learning agreements and institutional support for strong social partnership would anchor more inclusive learning and training systems.

# Typology

## Trade Union Involvement in Skills and Training Systems

### Governance & Design

#### OVERSIGHT



Partaking in processes around curriculum changes, legislative provisions or financing as members of advisory boards, consultative bodies or Skills Councils at the national/ regional/ sectoral level

#### TRAINING DESIGN



Participating in initial, continuous and workbased training design including on occupational skills needs, learning styles and transversal competencies, as well as by setting the programme, financial and duration parameters

#### ACCREDITATION



Designing and endorsing ways of testing and measuring knowledge and skills before, during and after a training and throughout the working life

### Bargaining & Standard-Setting

#### COLLECTIVE AGREEMENTS



Setting parameters on entitlements to training leave and on wage replacement schemes; the costs of, compensation and rights within a training programme (incl. employer contributions e.g. as a % of the pay bill); and wage or career path adjustments (title; task content) upon acquiring new qualifications

#### RE-ORGANISATION



Negotiating work re-organisation in broader agreements, following changes in ownership, technology or business models at sector or company level by helping to implement re-skilling or up-skilling programmes, providing career guidance and by setting associated parameters in job and work design

#### APPRENTICESHIPS & VET



Negotiating the design of programmes and pay rates, contributing to their funding, overseeing health and safety, mentoring, supporting the transition to a job

### Provision & Implementation

#### DIRECT PROVISION



(Co-)organising or financing of courses and programmes either through trade union or joint programmes with employers and/or governments

#### CONTINUAL PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT



Helping to design and deliver in-work CPD to keep professional skills up to date through appraisal and performance management and mentorship

#### WORKERS' VOICE



Unions and Union Learning Representatives provide networks, counselling and coaching. They encourage and help workers to take up training. In parallel, unions or works councils ensure representation of workforce interests, while teacher unions support good learning practices and environments

## Main Take-Aways

- Employees receive more training in unionised workplaces, in sectors covered by collective agreements and in governance systems that have both social partners directly involved on boards, councils or through established consultation mechanisms. Specifically, collective agreements over training, the joint administration of funds and the existence of union learning representatives or union-led or co-led programmes prove successful.
- The recognition of trade unions as actors in skills ecosystems is more prominent in OECD analysis compared to 2016. They are acknowledged as contributors to ‘fair transitions’ (see OECD/ G20 AI Principles or the Going Digital Synthesis Report), as direct VET and work-based learning providers, as part of governance systems (see the updated OECD Skills Strategy) and co-administrators of financing schemes, and as facilitators of more inclusive outcomes—amongst other through collective bargaining (see the revised OECD Jobs Strategy, ‘Negotiating our Way Up’ report). In its report on Getting Skills Right: Adult Learning, the OECD highlighted seven areas in which social partners take action.
- Trade unions focus on providing access to training throughout one’s working life, on ensuring more equal conditions and outcomes, as well as on professional progression which also entails securing training quality and wage adjustments. Tools for achieving these goals are manifold including collective agreements and policies / skills frameworks that entail provisions on rights to training, training leave and compensation and public investments. A pre-condition are governance structures striving to create sufficient and diverse learning opportunities.
- The multitude of trade union inputs into skills ecosystems and training is captured in the typology proposed in this paper. It is based on three subsets of activities:
  - (1) the design and governance of training—including oversight and accreditation; (2) bargaining and standard setting—including collective agreements, the re-organisation of sectors, occupations or workplaces, and the specific role of trade unions in apprenticeships and Vocational Education and Training (VET); (3) provision and implementation—which clusters around trade unions as direct providers of their own or joint programmes, as contributors to continual professional development and finally, in their core function to provide learners and workers with a voice.
- Case studies display best practices such as processes around curriculum or qualification re-design; collective agreements ensuring that more workers enter apprenticeship or adult learning programmes and/or receive enough pay and time to do so amongst other through social partner-administered funds, strategies to help vulnerable groups or workers in transition with career guidance and courses, and Union Learning Reps who bring thousands of employees into training. All of the above highlights that all of this is only possible in either policy systems encouraging social dialogue and/or having legal provisions securing collective bargaining around skills—or when trade unions are operating in an enabling environment and are able to mobilise resources to finance supporting activities.
- Several activities identified point to a new wave of financing commitments (e.g. through tripartite partnerships), of dual and work-based learning, of trade unions inputting into digital learning and new qualifications frameworks, and the resurgence of employment and jobs security schemes as potentially replicable transition mechanisms.
- The case studies also show the substantial role trade unions play as mentors, coaches and brokers in terms of getting workers into training via collective agreements, established employability schemes or networks.
- As cross-border company operations are flourishing, the emergence of training provisions in Global Framework Agreements (GFAs) between Global Trade Union Confederations and globally operating Multinational Enterprises is natural. While broad in nature, their numbers are increasing and the implementation of training-related clauses deserves attention.
- Going forward, more discussion and evidence is needed, including:
  - Empirical analysis on the role of social partners and the effect of labour market systems and reforms;
  - The interplay of social partners with and the place of teachers and training professionals in skills ecosystems;
  - Access avenues to adult learning both as work-based learning but also in re-skilling programmes (both VET and higher education) and solutions to access issues, including through a spatial lens;
  - Transitional funding needs to address the multi-faceted labour market transformations (digital, green, demographic).

# The skills ecosystem: Evidence on the role of social partners

**T**o move towards a more digitalised, global and green future of work that is built on the premise to secure quality jobs, many point to re- and up-skilling as prime solutions. **Just transitions entail investment into training to enable workers to keep their current jobs, to switch to new, ideally more complex and rewarding tasks or to change into a new job of similar quality.** As we move to a policy stage where the challenges of different economic and societal transformations become a bit clearer, quality job creation and quality education and training seem intrinsically tied.

And yet, the reality is that skills gaps and skills mismatches persist, public education and training systems are chronically underfunded, and entire population groups are falling behind with insufficient incentives or opportunities to re- or up-skill. Workers' skill levels also tend to match wage levels less and less. Evidence shows that when both social partners take part in training design and provision, outcomes are more inclusive and rewarding. Trade unions in particular deserve greater attention as actors in skills policies and as enablers of access to formal learning and to career progression.

## Lessons from the Union & Skills I Paper (2016)

The first TUAC Discussion Paper on 'Union & Skills' (2016) set out to a) showcase the different roles trade unions assume in skills systems and as training providers; b) present the challenges they are facing both

internally and externally; and c) display whether and how the OECD had discussed this in its reports and policy recommendations. The paper found that there is a growing space and need for trade union activities and collective bargaining in adult learning, especially given the pressure of technological change on labour markets. Secondly, given a limited recognition of social dialogue, collective bargaining and pro-active trade union strategies in lifelong learning by the OECD, the paper recommended to do more research and to exchange with the TUAC on best practices. It argued that by developing work on trade union activities, based on evidence, the scope of the OECD review processes and horizontal projects would broaden and policy recommendations would become more detailed.

Findings confirmed that unions are engaged on skills issues at the level of both national policy and workplace practice. It presented a few guiding examples on the TUC's UnionLearn programme (UK), the Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund's (DGB) influence on German apprenticeships, Norway's pioneering work to set up Union Learning Representatives, or the work of unions in the US construction industry (such as the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers; the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America). Several independent academic studies are cited that confirm union impact on skills uptake, together with evidence on employer satisfaction.

However, support for unions in negotiating parameters for training or as partners in direct provision is not enough. Increasing employer investment is equally important; as is training capacity. The paper



argued that more union engagement in skills leads to more employer investment and that co-design processes lead to better outcomes. The concept of a ‘skills ecosystem’ which weaves together all key stakeholders was considered as the guiding framework for practical application. It includes: governments, providers (e.g. training institutions, teachers and trainers, employers, unions, communities) and social partners as stakeholders, who jointly manage the design, financing, accreditation or awarding systems. To make it work, governments would support all elements of the ecosystem—including unions and collective agreements. The overarching message was that improving skills systems goes hand in hand with involving workers and hence involving trade unions:

- Unions are increasingly involved in skills, working with employers to improve the quality, quantity and equity of training.
- This reflects the growing importance of skills at work and growing demand from workers for a voice on their own training.
- There is strong evidence that union involvement improves the impact and sustainability of skills systems.
- Union involvement is most effective when unions are supported by government, providers and employers.

## New OECD Evidence

Since the initial TUAC assessment pointed to a lack of recognition of trade unions and collective agreements as contributing factors to more accessible and better functioning skills systems, recent OECD outputs have put a lot more emphasis on social partnership. Not least since the need for transitional measures is growing, including the up- and re-skilling of adult populations. When looking for best practices, analysts and policy makers must stumble upon existing social partnerships. When it comes to highlighting trade union activities, examples remain rare still—albeit this is on an upward slope. Several case studies flagged by the TUAC in the past are now frequently cited in OECD analysis such as the Sweden Job Security Councils or Union-Learn in the UK.

The review that follows focuses on OECD flagship outputs, all incidentally released in 2019: the **Revised Skills Strategy**; the Future of Work edition of the **Employment Outlook**; the **Getting Skills Right: Future-Ready Adult Learning Systems** report that outlines 7 areas of action for social partners in a special booklet on employer and trade union engagement in

adult learning; the **Negotiating Our Way Up: Collective Bargaining in a Changing World of Work** report; the **Going Digital Synthesis Report** summarising results from the first phase of its horizontal project on the digital transformation; the OECD (and G20) **AI Principles** formulated with multi-stakeholder inputs amongst them from trade unions (see OECD Council Recommendation on Artificial Intelligence and the G20 human-centred AI Principles), and the **Artificial Intelligence in Society** report.

A note of caution is warranted, the review below selects affirmative OECD statements on the role of trade unions, social dialogue and collective bargaining. There are enough blind spots still to fill, and many other OECD and external accounts do not adopt the same analytical perspective. Also, the OECD does not always go into detail on the unique ways in which unions can enhance, shape, or support skills strategies or training programmes. Oftentimes, trade unions rather are listed as “stakeholders”, “social partners”, or “labour market actors” without outlining a more specific function.

As follows, the review focusses on OECD references along four topic clusters:

1. the governance of skills ecosystems; 2. the role of collective bargaining; 3. social partners contributions to adult learning; and 4. transitional needs and technological change.

## The governance of skills ecosystems

The OECD in its update of the Skills Strategy (original from 2012)—a guiding framework for skills policy reform and application—explicitly recognises that skills policies should involve an array of stakeholders (including unions) through a whole-of-government lens and distinguishes between the educational, labour market and industry arenas:

*“Government officials, social partners and other stakeholders have noted that as skills policy lies at the intersection of education, labour market, industrial and other policy domains, it is an inherently complex policy domain. It implicates not only a great number of government ministries—not only ministries of education and employment but also ministries of economy, regional development, science, finance and many others—but often also multiple levels of government. Furthermore, the development and implementation of skills policy implicate a large and diverse range of actors in the educational arena (parental and student associations, teacher associations, educational institutions, etc.), labour market arena (trade unions, employers’ associations, etc.), industry arena (sectoral groups) and many others.” (Skills Strategy, p. 37)*

This is re-instated when discussing how to achieve more equitable outcomes through broader stakeholder engagement:

*“To improve the effectiveness and efficiency of skills policies, as well as to ensure more equitable skills outcomes, stakeholders must also be able to influence skills policy. These stakeholders include students, education institutions, trade unions, business associations, the unemployed, those employed in non-standard work, small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), etc. as well as voters and the general public who eventually are asked to foot the bill for higher levels of investment in skills formation via their taxes.” (Skills Strategy, p. 175)*

The benefits of involving social partners in established governance structures that are devising organisational parameters of training programmes are confirmed as follows:

*“In several OECD countries, social partners are represented on sectoral skills councils, which produce industry-specific long-term projections to ensure that current qualifications meet future demand for skills.” (Employment Outlook 2019, p. 194)*

Currently, the level of social partner involvement in governance varies widely between countries. The **Adult learning report’s** categorises national systems into three groups. It is striking that where social partners ‘define and manage the training system’, most are countries with traditionally stronger social dialogue systems (see Table 1).

### The role of collective bargaining

Collective bargaining serves to ensure a fair sharing of the benefits of training, technology and productive growth as part of its ‘inclusive function’ as the OECD confirms (**Negotiating Our Way Up**, p. 27). The Employment Outlook 2019 dedicates an entire chapter to collective bargaining, in which the OECD stresses its role in adjusting to the future of work (including the anticipation of skills needs) and confirms that it leads to labour market security and adaptability:

*“When social partners work co-operatively and anticipate new challenges, collective bargaining can support and usefully complement public policies. This is particularly the case for the regulation of new forms of work, the anticipation and meeting of skills needs, and the design of measures to help workers with the transition to new jobs. Collective bargaining, at both sectoral and firm levels can also help companies to adapt, through tailor-made agreements and adjustments in the organisation of work to meet their specific needs. Finally,*

**TABLE 1: Social partner involvement in governance of education and training systems**

<b>Social partners define and manage the training system</b>	Austria Denmark Germany	Iceland Italy Netherlands
<b>Social partners contribute to the definition of the training system</b>	Belgium Canada (AB, BC) Finland France Japan Luxembourg	Mexico Norway Poland Slovenia Switzerland Turkey
<b>Social partners have a consulting role</b>	Canada (QC) Czech Republic Estonia Greece Ireland Israel Latvia	Lithuania New Zealand Portugal Slovak Republic Spain Sweden
<b>Other</b>	Australia Hungary	United Kingdom United States

Source: OECD (2019), Getting Skills Right: Making adult learning work in social partnership, p. 4 (replicated)

*collective bargaining and social dialogue can help workers to make their voice heard in the design of national, sectoral or company-specific strategies and ensure a fair sharing of the benefits brought by new technologies and more globalised markets.” (Employment Outlook 2019, p. 215)*

A contingent issue in standard OECD recommendation is the role of Employment Protection Legislation (EPL), frequently going hand in hand with a regular employment contract covered by sector collective agreements. EPL and/or collective agreements often foresee notice periods before a worker is laid-off. Arguably, this gives time not only to seek a new job, but also to pursue training. A recognition of this is found in the Skills Strategy:

*“The success of early intervention services depends on having a long notice period prior to displacement. Active engagement with social partners combined with the development and use of skills anticipation exercises, like forecasting and foresight exercises, can assist in providing early warning of declining demand by occupation, sector or region.” (Skills Strategy, p. 147)*

The OECD’s collective bargaining report further looked in more detail into the impact of collective bargaining and worker representation (‘workers’ voice’) within firms along five non-monetary dimensions—including on training and re-skilling:

“The presence of any type of voice arrangements is positively associated with workers’ access to training. Access to life-long training for workers is an increasingly important issue in collective bargaining agreements, as some landmark agreements in Denmark or Italy show. Yet, on average in OECD countries, only about 15% of firms are covered by an agreement including provisions on training” (**Negotiating Our Way Up**, p. 164).

The 15% of firms reporting a collective agreement on training is quite low—however, the firm size is worth considering as well as the employers’ role (and at times reluctance or constraints) to provide or grant access to training to employees—possibly contributing to a lower number of CB agreements on training.

### Social partners contributions to adult learning

Training up-take is still considerably low and varies significantly between higher and lower skill and income levels, and across regions. The OECD in looking at these challenges began to highlight the role of social partners:

“... according to data PIAAC, only 41% of adults in the surveyed OECD Member countries participate in formal or non-formal adult learning in any given year. [...] Ensuring broad-based participation in adult learning must top the agenda of governments, employers, social partners and adult-learning providers who want to shape a future of work that is both more productive and inclusive.” (**Skills Strategy**, p. 58)

The Adult Learning Report and its accompanying booklet on social partners (see **Box 1**) specifically goes into detail on social partner activities and their merit given their proximity to workers and employers:

“The social partners, i.e. employers’ organisations and trade unions, play an important role in adult learning systems across the OECD. They are often involved in the development, financing, and monitoring of adult learning programmes, and also influence the adult learning agenda by having a say in the policy debate while ensuring that adult learning provisions are reflected in collective agreements. Due to their proximity to workers and employers, governments should aim to collaborate with them and involve them in the elaboration and implementation of the adult learning policy agenda.” (**Adult learning report**, p. 107)

There is recognition that “unions are being effective at promoting inclusiveness in adult learning” (**Adult learning report**, p. 47). This also relates to involving them more in the pursuit of integrating vulnerable groups—including migrants—into training and labour market systems “to develop procedures for evaluating and recognising foreign qualifications and skills.” (**Skills Strategy**, p. 143).

On the financing of adult learning, the OECD highlights social partner co-managed funds (**Employment Outlook 2019**, p. 194) and presents varying degrees of social partner engagement:

**TABLE 2: How much are social partners’ involved in training programmes in OECD countries?**

<b>Trade unions and / or employers finance some ad-hoc training initiatives</b>	Australia	Latvia
	Chile	Norway
	Czech Republic	United Kingdom
	Estonia	United States
	Finland	
<b>Employers pay a compulsory training levy to a government fund</b>	Canada (QB)	Poland
	Ireland	Spain
	Korea	
<b>Social partners are in charge of managing training funds</b> (at least in several sectors, and they can be mandated by law or agreed upon through collective bargaining)	Austria	Iceland
	Belgium	Italy
	Denmark	Luxembourg
	France	Netherlands
	Germany	Sweden
	Greece	Switzerland

Source: Employment Outlook 2019, p. 194 (replicated)

Overall, on adult learning, these new OECD outputs provide a good repository of adult learning systems that involve social partners at different scales and levels. The Getting Skills Right report’s booklet delivers several specific case studies and the seven actions undertaken by social partners<sup>12</sup> (see Box 1).

### Transitional needs and technological change

In past years, discussions on how labour markets will transform due to rapid digital change and the transition to a lower carbon economy become more substantial. Trade unions have argued that workers need to be supported through strong labour market institutions and the set-up of just transition frameworks. And, indeed the OECD predicts ‘a massive training challenge’ (**Going Digital Synthesis Report** (2019), p. 85). The OECD’s ‘Going Digital’ horizontal project as well as the OECD/G20 AI principles acknowledge that fair transitions and social dialogue

## Box 1: Unions & Social Partners in the OECD Adult Learning Report

In 2019, the OECD released a dedicated report on adult learning, *Getting Skills Right: Future-Ready Adult Learning Systems*. Trade unions and social partners occupy the centre stage in a companion booklet: *“Getting Skills Right: Making adult learning work in social partnership.”* In order to increase or optimise the involvement of both social partners in training governance or provision, the report suggests: “increasing cooperation [on adult learning] between the government, the social partners and other stakeholders, for example, by involving stakeholders in the design/update of the adult learning legal framework, developing tripartite agreements, establishing formal procedures for consultation with stakeholders in the legal frameworks, and/or developing committees, councils, advisory bodies or fora to establish a structured dialogue with stakeholders” (p. 18). The report views programme governance as a key space in which social partners can contribute to adult learning. To coordinate their actions, “tripartite” agreements between labour, employers, and governments can be developed which establish shared priorities and goals; coordination can also be achieved through advisory bodies with representation from labour, employers, and governments.

The 7 “areas of action” for social partner involvement in adult learning are defined as follows:

- 1 Anticipate training needs together
- 2 Establish joint priorities in adult learning strategies
- 3 Negotiate collective agreements for adult learning
- 4 Promote a positive learning culture
- 5 Consider employer levies to finance adult learning
- 6 Use the capacity of all partners to deliver training
- 7 Make quality assurance a joint responsibility

Alongside each ‘Action’, concrete case studies are provided such as:

- “Skills Councils have been established in many countries and regions. They can include government funding (facilitating wider co-ordination and more staff, e.g. Canada) or be funded solely by unions/employers (allowing for flexibility and independence, e.g. France). However, there must be attention to preserving the views of SMEs and non-union workers on such large-scale boards.” (Action 1)
- “One exemplary agreement in Denmark, signed in 2017, allocates more than 2 billion euros in funding for the training of workers across the skills and income spectrum to prepare for upcoming labour market needs.” (Action 3)
- “Governments and social partners have undertaken joint management of training design and delivery. In Iceland, the adult education system (indeed, the entire education system) is managed through the Education and Training Service Centre (ETSC), owned in partnership by unions, employer organisations, and the government. The organisation’s duties include identifying training needs, working with education providers to develop training programmes, monitoring quality, and managing funds gathered from a levy on employers.” (Action 6)

With this in mind, the report concludes that “trade unions are best positioned to help workers make long-term investments in transferable skills, while employers are best positioned to understand and train the skills required for their firm/industry. Adult learning programs should leverage both kinds of social partners to provide relevant, holistic training” (p.15).



will be needed with both social partners on board. Part of fair or just transitions is sufficient funding and access to quality training regardless of age, income or employment contract. Almost all of the reviewed outputs endorse a fair transition approach that would amongst other rely on social partners:

“Governments should take steps, including through social dialogue, to ensure a fair transition for workers as AI is deployed.” (OECD AI Principles)

“New job creation combined with likely changes to and possible destruction of existing jobs transforms labour markets. Governments, together with social partners, need to help workers transition into new jobs. Adapting to technological progress and new forms of organisations and work requires policies to facilitate the transition of workers across businesses, industries, regions and occupations”. (Going Digital Synthesis Report (2019), p. 87)

“Key policy questions with respect to AI and jobs relate to managing the transition. Policies for managing the transition include social safety nets, health insurance, progressive taxation of labour and capital, and education.” (AI for society report, p. 110)

“Promoting labour market participation call on to “assist workers in transition prior to their displacement. The reallocation of displaced workers between firms, industries and regions should be supported by early intervention and re-employment measures, including counselling and reskilling. Since successful intervention depends on long lead times, active engagement with social partners and the development and use of skills anticipation exercises are needed.” (Skills Strategy , p. 141)

As to how to absorb the transformational tendencies with which digital technologies transform labour markets, the OECD recommends a policy mix:

“Adaptability and resilience are particularly important in the context of digital transformation since they require flexibility for firms and the mobility of workers, investments in skills and training, the provision of well-set minimum wages and adequate social safety nets, combined with strong activation policies, targeted support for displaced workers, social dialogue and collective bargaining at different levels.” (Going Digital Synthesis Report (2019), p. 87)

In view of devising appropriate education and training policies, the OECD rightfully makes a link to job quality (including fair wages) and skills use:

“It is also important to design education and training policies to facilitate transitions across occupations, while ensuring quality jobs that make maximal use of workers’ skill sets and offer attractive compensation.” (Going Digital Synthesis Report (2019), p. 87)

The OECD also rings the alarm bells concerning big funding gaps in training systems, the challenge to reach those most in need of training and the fact that digital systems might soon outperform some human workers in certain routine and cognitive tasks:

“Only 0.13% of GDP on average is spent on training of the unemployed and of workers at risk of involuntary unemployment”. (Going Digital Synthesis Report (2019), p. 84)

“Participation in training by low-skilled adults—those most likely to be affected by the changes ahead—is 40 percentage points below that of high-skilled adults on average across OECD countries.” (Employment Outlook 2019, p. 15)

“Computers are already now considered to be close to reproducing the proficiency of literacy skills used by 62% of workers every day in OECD countries (Elliott, 2017).” (Going Digital Synthesis Report (2019), p. 86)

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**All of the above excerpts from OECD reports and the AI Principles display urgency to foster better and more effective training provision for adults and acknowledge the importance to safeguard the quality of work. Not only is the recognition of intermediaries such as social partners in the governance, financing and direct programme delivery and administration important but so is the distinction between national systems. There is no one-size-fits all approach. Yet, stakes are**

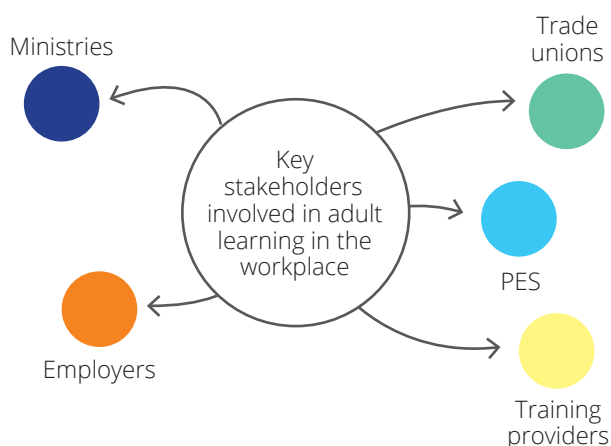
**high to make training more accessible, effective and rewarding for employees. To do so, this paper moves beyond the ‘recognition phase’ towards concrete examples of trade union activities. They are by no means replicable across the board (as yet again this depends on the system). Yet, they could be scaled up significantly or adapted elsewhere with the support from governments and public authorities, and cooperation with employers.**

# How Unions support Skills Development – A Typology

Trade union involvement and strategies on training are as diverse as the skills ecosystems they are in. It all depends on as to whether trade union inputs and activities are facilitated by the openness of policy makers and employers to social dialogue and collective agreements, and on the resources the trade unions have at their disposal to meaningfully participate. Clearly defined rules and responsibilities for all stakeholders help more pertinent engagement and dialogue. In an ideal, simplified scenario, trade unions are key stakeholders in adult learning.<sup>13</sup>

Trade unions pre-dominantly focus on providing access to training throughout working life (especially for lower-skilled, lower-paid and more vulnerable groups, to whom employers tend to provide less training and who need incentives to participate in it), and trade unions ensure more equal conditions and outcomes, as well as professional progression. **The intent of trade unions mostly is to ensure that lifelong training systems are inclusive and yield positive labour market outcomes.**

Access, equality and progression are intrinsically linked. Pre-conditions towards achieving these goals are sufficient investments and governance systems enabling enough learning opportunities. Similarly, provisions on rights to training, training leave and adequate compensation constitute key incentives for employees. As for trade unions, collective bargaining systems vary in coverage and union density levels. Oftentimes, the space for trade union involvement needs to be created first. In the UK for example, “*the role of trade unions in the skills system has been partially recognised by Government, and its industrial strategy renewed funding for the Union Learning Fund and set out a plan for a National Retraining Partnership—made up of TUC and CBI—that will oversee the implementation of a National Retraining Scheme in England (BEIS 2017b).*”<sup>14</sup> This National Retraining Scheme is aimed at adults whose jobs are at risk from automation and the first operational element of the programme, the ‘Get Help to Retrain’ digital service, is currently being rolled out across English regions. In other words, a tripartite structure had been set up intentionally with allocated funding and set deliverables.



Institutionalised or standing tri- or bi-partite structures (employers and unions only) prove to be effective. **Agreements around common goals to bring more adults into re-skilling programmes thrive on concrete measures.** The 2017 Danish tripartite agreement on adult and continuing training (VEU)<sup>15</sup> for example sets up a reconversion fund worth €53.6 million as of March 2018.<sup>16</sup> And there is evidence that, when social partners work together, employers tend to invest more in training opportunities: *“the involvement of stakeholders, including employer representatives and trade unions at industry or local level, can also help to generate and maintain employer and industry ‘buy-in’. Such support is likely to be particularly important with employers or sectors that have limited experience of training”*.<sup>17</sup> The Swedish Jobs Security Councils or the Irish Skillnets system display the effectiveness of funding and supporting networks administered by both social partners and established along sectoral and regional lines.

Policies that foresee social partner consultations or promote (also legally) collective agreements and governance of VET and training by employer and worker organisations are certainly helpful. **Where a culture of social partnership on training exists,**

**forward looking changes to the benefit of workers are more likely.** For instance, radical reforms of training schemes demanded by the German metal union, IGMetall, were finally agreed on by employers to make employees in IT centred professions fit for the digital transformation. These new training programmes taking effect in August 2020 include a new professional structure as well as new mandatory training content like data and process analytics, higher skills in data protection and data security and a stronger emphasis on “soft skills”.

In the absence of such processes, trade unions have to rely on ad-hoc access to policy processes and willingness of others to co-operate. In other systems, unions operate pre-dominantly at the firm level and/or provide services unilaterally. Furthermore, unions might lack resources or prioritise differently, and hence not always be active in training provision or career guidance. With these framework conditions and limitations in mind, the below case studies depict examples where meaningful activities were possible.

## Typology - Trade Union Involvement in Skills and Training Systems

The typology proposed below captures three types of trade union involvement in skills systems. First, the **governance and design** of training—including oversight and accreditation. Secondly, **bargaining and standard setting**—including collective agreements, the re-organisation of sectors, occupations or workplaces, and the specific role of trade unions in apprenticeships and Vocational Education and Training (VET). Third, **provision and implementation**—which clusters around trade unions as direct providers of their own or joint programmes, as contributors of continual professional development and finally, in their core functions to provide learners and workers with a voice.

Overarching principles towards inclusive training systems
<p><b>Access</b></p> <p>Collective agreements and social dialogue processes can set or promote frameworks that enable rights to training, paid training leave/ compensation and time for training.</p>
<p><b>Equality</b></p> <p>Unions support the low paid, less qualified, under-represented or those who lack access to education systems. They try to bargain for enough learning opportunities and guarantees for wage / career progression of apprentices and workers.</p>
<p><b>Progression</b></p> <p>With union support, take-up, retention and progression rates are higher at all educational levels. Unions encourage a culture of dynamic and continuous adult training throughout a working life and are often times involved in continuous professional development.</p>

# Typology

## Trade Union Involvement in Skills and Training Systems

### Governance & Design

#### OVERSIGHT



Partaking in processes around curriculum changes, legislative provisions or financing as members of advisory boards, consultative bodies or Skills Councils at the national/ regional/ sectoral level

#### TRAINING DESIGN



Participating in initial, continuous and workbased training design including on occupational skills needs, learning styles and transversal competencies, as well as by setting the programme, financial and duration parameters

#### ACCREDITATION



Designing and endorsing ways of testing and measuring knowledge and skills before, during and after a training and throughout the working life

### Bargaining & Standard-Setting

#### COLLECTIVE AGREEMENTS



Setting parameters on entitlements to training leave and on wage replacement schemes; the costs of, compensation and rights within a training programme (incl. employer contributions e.g. as a % of the pay bill); and wage or career path adjustments (title; task content) upon acquiring new qualifications

#### RE-ORGANISATION



Negotiating work re-organisation in broader agreements, following changes in ownership, technology or business models at sector or company level by helping to implement re-skilling or up-skilling programmes, providing career guidance and by setting associated parameters in job and work design

#### APPRENTICESHIPS & VET



Negotiating the design of programmes and pay rates, contributing to their funding, overseeing health and safety, mentoring, supporting the transition to a job

### Provision & Implementation

#### DIRECT PROVISION



(Co-)organising or financing of courses and programmes either through trade union or joint programmes with employers and/or governments

#### CONTINUAL PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT



Helping to design and deliver in-work CPD to keep professional skills up to date through appraisal and performance management and mentorship

#### WORKERS' VOICE



Unions and Union Learning Representatives provide networks, counselling and coaching. They encourage and help workers to take up training. In parallel, unions or works councils ensure representation of workforce interests, while teacher unions support good learning practices and environments



# Case Studies

In an effort to capture the diversity of activities outlined in the typology, the collected case studies from TUAC members and partners display best practices such as processes around curriculum and qualification re-design, collective agreements ensuring that more workers enter apprenticeships or adult learning programmes and/or receive enough pay and time to do so amongst other through social partner-administered funds, strategies to help vulnerable workers and those in transition with career guidance and courses, and Union Learning Reps who bring thousands of employees into training.

The ‘Apprenticeships & VET’ dimension will be discussed in a separate section given the strong trade union engagement in this field with an in-depth look at Germany. Finally, the last section explores training provisions in Global Framework Agreements (GFAs) between Global Trade Union Confederations and Multinational Enterprises, which emerge more and more as company operations transcend borders. While broad in nature, their numbers are increasing and given their recent nature, the implementation of training-related clauses deserves attention.

## Design & Governance

- **Advocating legislative action on leave for training (Sweden/ Finland)**
- **Introduction of digital education and digital strategies (Austria)**
- **Sectoral training boards (Denmark)**
- **Formal certifications for skills learned on the job (Chile)**

### Advocating legislative action on leave for training (Sweden/ Finland)

**OVERSIGHT** 

In 1974, the Swedish Trade Union Confederation confronted a dilemma: businesses did not want to include leave for training in collective agreements. As a result, the confederation decided instead to advocate for national legislation which would guarantee such opportunities to employees. The Individual Training Leave Act, passed that year, had two aims: “to encourage social and occupational mobility and to facilitate access to education for employees with the

lowest levels of compulsory education. While the training leave legislation offers no compensation for loss of income, a system of individualized non means-tested public grants and loans with highly subsidized interest rates and other repayment terms sustain the exercise of this right”.<sup>18</sup> Union support was key in drafting and passing this legislation. In Finland, the Study Leave Act dates back to 1979.<sup>19</sup> Every employee who has worked for the same employer for at least one year is entitled to take a training leave of a maximum of two years. As in Sweden, the training leave offers no compensation for the loss of income during the training, however the Employment Fund (see below) covers the expenses.

### Introduction of digital education and digital strategies (Austria)

**OVERSIGHT + TRAINING DESIGN**  

Trade unions and employers in Austria have representatives on the boards of the Austrian Employment Centre and the Council on Vocational Training. The Austrian Trade Union Confederation’s (ÖGB) representatives were involved in the negotiations on

the adopted curricula on basic digital education and the digital strategy of the Austrian Federal Ministry of Education. Similar examples of involvement of trade unions in national digital education or future of work/ Industry 4.0 exist in various OECD member countries including Germany and the UK.

## Sector training boards (Denmark)

### TRAINING DESIGN

The Danish government, in concert with unions and social partners, has established sectoral training boards to govern adult learning. For example, the Transport Training Board (Danish: Transporterhvervets Uddannelser, TUR) is “responsible for setting national standards and goals for all apprenticeship training for operative personnel of the transportation sector in Denmark, as well as for all labour market training (the AMU System) for the same sector. Transport and logistic training and education, supervised by the Board, cover all kinds of training for operative personnel. ... Representatives from labour unions and employers’ associations within the transport sector make up the Board in parity [and] all committees are formed in parity with equal numbers from employers’ associations—often manned by (an) important company representative(s) of the branch—and from labour unions”.<sup>20</sup>

## Formal certifications for skills learned on the job (Chile)

### ACCREDITATION

The Chilean Federation of Contractor Workers (FETRACON) recently worked with Chile’s National Petroleum Company to certify over 500 employees. Many of the workers had started at the company without much formal schooling, so the skills that they had developed on the job were not always recognised when they applied for promotions or other positions. With the help of the National Training and Employment Service (SENCE), the trade unions of FETRACON have designed a system which better reflects worker skills, ensuring quality for the employer and recognition of learning for employees. A similar process was undertaken in Chile’s school lunch programme, where qualified food service workers were disadvantaged when competing for positions with individuals who had certifications of food service training. The trade union negotiated with the Ministry of Education to create certification schemes for long-time employees and to ensure that all qualified employees could participate in it to gain formal recognition of skills.

## Bargaining & Standard Setting

- **Bipartite agreement on promoting training and gender equality (Germany)**
- **Tri- and bipartite agreements on time off for training (Belgium)**
- **Skills development agreements for immigrants and unemployed (Sweden)**
- **Legislative advocacy and legal protections (Japan)**
- **New skills for the digital transformation (France)**
- **Agile qualification options (Germany)**

## Bipartite agreement on promoting training & gender equality (Germany)

### COLLECTIVE AGREEMENTS

Germany’s trade union and business organisations have negotiated mutually binding guidelines for training and gender equality. Social partners are closely involved in the design of the European Social Fund and ensure that its implementation aligns with the aforementioned guidelines. As a result, over 40,000 employees have benefitted from more than 150 projects providing resources for continuing education, as well as important support for gender equality measures such as career progress and equal pay. The social partners continue to promote this evolving agenda, with particular focus on the growing challenges of digitisation and the sustainable training structures needed to prepare the workforce for these changes.<sup>21</sup>

## Tri- and Bipartite agreements on time off for training (Belgium)

### COLLECTIVE AGREEMENTS

In 2001, Belgian social partners reached an agreement to introduce a “time credit” in the private sector: the right of individual workers to a temporary career break or to work part time during a limited period, with partial compensation of the wage loss from a new social security benefit (paid by the National Office for Labour Provision). The right to training leave is limited to intensive training courses as recognised by regional authorities, to literacy courses, or to special “second chance” programmes to obtain a certificate for initial secondary education. To incentivise the take up of federal time credit and to make up for the wage loss, the Flemish government has agreed to an extra benefit on top of the federal social security benefit.

In 2017, Belgian social partners and the government worked to pass a law on “agile and feasible work” which amended some of these provisions. Previously, private sector employers were legally obliged to spend at least 1.9% of their wage cost on employee training. The new law, at the Federal Government level, changed the obligation to instead provide an average of five days of training per year, with some exemptions for smaller companies. Because the spending rule was a requirement, whereas the new rule is an entitlement, it is up to both social partners to make it more concrete and enforceable via sectoral branch agreements.

### Skills development agreements for immigrants and unemployed (Sweden)

**COLLECTIVE AGREEMENTS** 

On the initiative of the Swedish Trade Union Confederation, the Swedish government and social partners have recently signed “entry agreements” for newly arrived immigrants, as well as long-term unemployed individuals. The aim is to help them to become established in the labour market and to facilitate future skills provision for employers, through courses and training for useful labour market skills. The job-seeker will be given the opportunity to learn Swedish, if needed, as well as take other short training courses as agreed on by employers and potential employees. Funds will be available for adult vocational courses relevant to both parties. It is generally hoped that these entry agreements will lead to permanent, full-time employment with employers. The ambition of the government and the social partners was to introduce these entry agreements during the second half of 2019.<sup>22</sup>

### Legislative advocacy and legal protections (Japan)

**RE-ORGANISATION** 

The Japanese Trade Union Confederation (RENGO) has been advocating with government, political parties, and deliberative assemblies such as the Industrial Structure Council (ministry-level regulatory body) to strengthen national structures for skills developments. The priorities include development of human resources by implementing appropriate education and training of workers who are undergoing unavoidable changes in occupation or labour transitions, strengthening social safety nets, such as expanding employment insurance benefits, and enhancing governmental support for investments by enterprises in human resources, facilities, R&D, etc. One important outcome is a 2019 law on human

investment in employees by companies, also referencing the importance of appropriate curricula set by educational institutions.

### New skills for the digital transformation (France)

**RE-ORGANISATION** 

French telecommunications company Orange Telecom and five trade unions (CFDT, FO, CGT, CFE and SUD) signed a bipartite agreement to update workers’ rights and training for the digital transition.<sup>23</sup> The 56-page agreement contains commitments on employee data protection (including transparency over use and full disclosure), work-life-balance, training and the introduction of new technological equipment.

### Agile qualification options (Germany)

**RE-ORGANISATION** 

In Germany, the content of initial and continuing VET is agreed amongst social partners. New skills requirements and the need for innovation are usually spearheaded by sectoral trade unions and employers’ organisations. But sometimes it takes years of negotiations to convince the employers’ organisations to agree on the necessary reforms. A re-organisation and/or updating of apprenticeship schemes took effect in 2018 for the metal and electrical professions, as well as mechatronics. For this set of professions, social partners agreed on an “agile process” which would entail updating qualifications relevant to the digital transformation on a shorter notice at sector level without changing the design of the training programmes entirely. Additional qualifications would be available as optional offers in both initial VET programmes and further training for workers. Trainers and works councils are able to adjust such offers via co-determination at company level—this is to ensure that they correspond to a company’s digital maturity, capacity and needs. The initial vocational training is thus made more flexible in accordance with the company’s qualification needs and the interests of the trainees. At the same time, a nationwide recognition of the additional qualifications is guaranteed.

## Provision & Implementation

- **Training funds (The Netherlands)**
- **The Employment Fund (Finland)**
- **Social advocacy and education partnerships (Ireland)**
- **Supporting re-employment after illness or injury (Iceland)**
- **Career counselling for the digital transition (Belgium)**
- **Career guidance network and youth programme (Finland)**
- **Tripartite mentoring framework for teachers (Norway)**
- **New Career Pathways for Teachers (Scotland)**
- **UnionLearn (UK)**

### Training funds (The Netherlands)

#### DIRECT PROVISION

Dutch trade unions frequently negotiate with employers to establish training funds (“O&O fondsen”), typically funded by an employer levy. Approximately one fifth of worker training in the country is paid for by such funds. These funds also organise important training infrastructure: establishing networks and education agreements, regulating the supply and demand of education, researching financial solutions, providing guidance for employees, and so on. There are about 125 funds, governed by social partners (both sit on their boards) and primarily financed by companies via the payroll levy. In 2007, 5.9 million of the 6.9 million Dutch employees (86 percent) were under the responsibility of O&O fondsen. The inflow into the funds in 2010 was 444.3 million euros, with half of the money spent on education.<sup>24</sup> With these funds, a variety of activities to help train and develop workers is being undertaken. One fund in the motor vehicle industry pays for career coaches to help employees plan. Another, in the temporary employment sector, issues training vouchers for up to € 500, which can be used by workers on any accredited program. Other funds have facilitated cooperation between employers and trade unions to recruit and train employees in high-demand industries.

### The Employment Fund (Finland)

#### DIRECT PROVISION

Finland’s Unemployment Fund is a joint union–employer institution which funds earnings-related unemployment benefits and promotes skills development through adult education benefits. The fund is managed by a board of directors composed of seven representatives from employer organisations and seven from unions.<sup>25</sup> “Unemployment insurance contributions are collected from both employers and employees on the basis of the actualised wage bill. Contributions are paid to the Employment Fund by the employer, which withholds the employee’s share from the employee’s pay. In 2019, the employee’s contribution was 1.50% of the pay ... The average employers’ contribution is the same as for the employer, that is, 1.50% of the wage bill”.<sup>26</sup> The programme provides funds for employees to pay for qualified training and development, including an agreement for the government to pay for skills development for entrepreneurs.

### Social advocacy and education partnerships (Ireland)

#### DIRECT PROVISION

The Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) and its affiliates provide significant financial assistance to civil society organisations, including charities, who promote professional development for vulnerable individuals and communities. The ICTU is represented on the boards of agencies such as the National Women’s Council, the Children’s Right Alliance, and migrant rights bodies, each of which has initiatives dealing with skills and training for vulnerable adults, families and communities. Additionally, the ICTU and other unions help manage the People’s College, established in 1948, which provides low-cost adult education to workers in Dublin. Currently it has more than 1000 learners across 60 courses. This is rooted in long-standing, more general cooperation: since the 1980s, the ICTU and other unions have cooperated with the government to establish regional training centres for basic adult education, labour market activation programmes and cultural and recreational facilities.

### Supporting re-employment after illness or injury (Iceland)

#### DIRECT PROVISION

Social partners in Iceland, with government funding and support, have established a Vocational Rehabilitation Fund (VIRK). All major unions and employers



in the labour market in Iceland are members. VIRK's mission is to develop, integrate and monitor services in the field of vocational rehabilitation, aiming systematically for employment of individuals following illness or injury. The organisation provides expert advice and services in the field of vocational rehabilitation, working with the individual to create a long-term plan. Vocational rehabilitation counsellors work on behalf of VIRK and are situated within unions across the country. VIRK services are free of charge for individuals.

## Career counselling for the digital transition (Belgium)

### DIRECT PROVISION

Belgium's ACV-CSC trade union federation offers career counselling for workers and jobseekers, especially elderly unemployed, called *bijblijfwerving*. It provides individual and collective guidance on applying for a job, orientation, lifelong learning, and the rights and duties of jobseekers. The *bijblijf*-coaches primarily work on digital barriers in transition to work (including towards applying digital tools of the public employment service VDAB). In 2017, coaches worked with more than 7,000 people. Jobseekers are able to discuss and practice collectively. The service is partly financed by government funding, as well as through cooperation with other trade unions. For example, in Flanders, the Flemish government actively encourages career counselling services by means of career cheques which allow for 4 hours career counselling services with a recognized centre.

## Career guidance network and youth programme (Finland)

### DIRECT PROVISION

Finnish unions provide career services for their members and non-members including career counselling, web-based coaching and are assisting in the job search. Many of these services are classified as compatible to PES and can thus be taken as a proof for an active job search. To reinforce its own system, the Akava confederation of unions for professional and managerial staff is building a new network that will coordinate the career services provided by its members and mainstream those to other sectors who have not yet fully developed such offers. The new networks covers 2/3 of Akava's membership extending to over 600 000 people. As services such as mentoring programmes and CV clinics are becoming highly sought after, the union works on cost-effective measures and expansion. The trade

union 'Pro', one of the STTK's largest members, is another example for career service provision (many other STTK affiliates do the same). Its 120,000 members (90,000 actively in the labour market) are trained professionals, experts and managerial staff in both the private and public sector. The career services include amongst other on-line meetings with a personal coach, and focused on-line training for members who are unemployed and are over 50 years old.<sup>27</sup> On the other end of the spectrum, to foster youth employment, the three main Finnish unions, SAK, Akava and STTK, are also offering free advice to young people regarding summer jobs and working life.<sup>28</sup> A special help line is open for everyone from the beginning of May until the end of September. Union representatives also give lectures in higher education institutions as part of the curriculum around employability and working life.

## Tripartite mentoring framework for teachers (Norway)

### CONTINUAL PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The Norwegian Ministry of Education, teacher unions, employer organisations and local authorities have developed a framework and guidance<sup>29</sup> to facilitate the entry of newly qualified teachers (NQTs) into kindergardens and schools. The main goal is to improve mentoring programmes to allow effective on-the-job transitions and the effective use of learned competencies. The agreement is also seen as a response to early drop-out rates. Prior to the agreement, it was found that "four out of ten NQTs do not receive mentoring, and that there are large variations in scope, content, frequency, structure and quality of the mentoring". The new mentoring scheme sets out to cover all entrants and to foster local adaptation. It defines clear responsibilities for all signatory parties—including trade unions (motivating teachers, monitoring) and employers (e.g. competence development of mentors)—with the intention to promote trusted relationships based on clear planning and regular interactions between the mentor and the young professional. An evaluation will take place by the end of 2020/2021 including social dialogue on the follow-up.

## New Career Pathways for Teachers (Scotland)

### CONTINUAL PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

In 2017, the Scottish Negotiating Committee for Teachers (SNCT), a national tripartite body established an Independent Panel on Career Pathways for Teachers. The idea originated from a commitment

between the government and teacher unions at the OECD's International Summit for the Teaching Profession (March 2017) The Panel was tasked to identify flexible pathways and opportunities for teachers (later on also for headteachers). The results and 10 recommendations were published in May 2019, which were all accepted by the SNCT. A work plan has been prepared and working groups have been established with union participation with the goal to implement the recommendations by August 2021. Amongst other things, the panel recommends the creation of new roles, a review of job sizing and pay scales, the possibility of sabbaticals—towards making “high quality, systematic, coherent and accessible support for career developments.”

## Unionlearn (UK)

### WORKERS' VOICE

Set up in 2006, Unionlearn is the learning and skills arm of the TUC, the national Trade Union Centre in the UK. Since its inception it has helped nearly 3 million workplace learners,<sup>31</sup> trained 41,000 Union Learning Reps and became an established part of the UK skills landscape. The programme succeeds in enabling 250,000 workers per year on average to pursue training. A 2013 employer survey<sup>32</sup> found that:

- 74% of employers felt they got a positive return on their investment in union learning;
- Two thirds reported increased demand from employees, especially from those with little history of involvement in learning: UnionLearn programmes engaged learners from all backgrounds, although participation and achievement (in terms of qualification gain) appears more likely to be realised by those with lower prior levels of qualification.
- Employers also reported that staff morale, staff turnover and (albeit to a lesser extent) levels of trust have increased.

A 2015 report<sup>33</sup> from Leeds University, based on the official UK wide 2011 Workplace Employee Relations Survey and annual Labour Force Surveys from 2001 to 2013, concluded that non-union members bene-

fit from being in a unionised learning environment, as 38% report a recent training period compared to 25% in workplaces where unions do not have negotiating rights.

Three aspects of union presence—union recognition, union negotiation/consultation over training, and the existence of ULRs—are all associated with higher levels of training being received by employees, i.e. 5 days or more per year than in other workplaces where unions were not present. A report from UCL University<sup>34</sup>, based on an analysis of the annual Labour Force Surveys and other large datasets since 2010, has confirmed the union boost to workplace training in the UK, including that:

- training volumes average a 19% higher level in unionised workplaces;
- 37% of union members say that they accessed training in the latest 3 months compared to 22% of non-union members.

The latest survey of workers engaging in union-led learning or training facilitated by Unionlearn and the Union Learning Fund (ULF) was conducted by Exeter university<sup>35</sup> in 2018, covering a sample of 2,500 learners with the following key findings:

- 7 out of 10 learners said that they would not have taken part in the learning or training without union support and the effect is even greater for people without any qualifications, (8 out of 10);
- 73% reported being more confident in their abilities and 77% were keen to undertake further learning and training;
  - 9 out of 10 participants gained at least one new skill, nearly two thirds gained a qualification, and 1 in 4 gained promotion or greater responsibility in their current job;
- Every £1 invested generated an additional £12 (in cash or time) with over £7 going to individuals and £5 to employers;
- There is a boost to union membership—1 in 2 of non-union members engaging in union learning subsequently go on to join a union.

## Zoom-in: Apprenticeships

Trade unions traditionally play a significant role in apprentice programmes. It varies from country to country, shaped by historical as well as cultural considerations, but many of the most successful apprenticeship programmes involve consistent trade union participation in some form or another. This section outlines some of the primary ways in which unions support apprenticeships, then discusses several case studies which exemplify these strategies.<sup>36</sup> International organisations looking into the governance and efficiency of apprenticeship systems acknowledge the importance of trade unions and social partners in successfully executing apprenticeship programs such as the ILO<sup>37</sup> and the European Union.<sup>38</sup>

### Box 2: ILO Toolkit on the Trade Union Role in “Quality Apprenticeships”

- Engaging in social dialogue and actively participating in policy-making regarding Quality Apprenticeships, particularly at the sectoral level within sectoral skills councils;
- Building confidence and trust among stakeholders;
- Where appropriate, incorporating Quality Apprenticeships into the agenda of collective bargaining and collective agreements; and
- Supporting the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of Quality Apprenticeship programmes—including the development of competency and qualification standards—and participating in the assessment of competences.

From the International Labour Organisation Toolkit for Quality Apprenticeships, 2017, p. 58.

As with adult learning, trade unions employ collective bargaining to set fair wages, terms, and post-programme employment trajectories for apprentices, both at the company and sector level. They also negotiate for the provision of an adequate number of apprenticeship places—in many countries by being involved in national or regional policy settings. Trade unions can use their links with workers representatives and the apprentices themselves to pass on feedback about programmes, as well as connect apprentices with a support network and mentors. When needed, unions can also play “an important role in helping to ensure that apprentices’ rights in law are safeguarded”.<sup>39</sup>

Trade union involvement in apprenticeships is not only theoretically wise, but also has proved to work in the real world. OECD research indicates that apprenticeships are more likely to be undertaken by employers in industries with greater union density.<sup>40</sup> Another study from the US indicated that when unions are involved in apprenticeship design and implementation, apprentices are more likely to complete the programmes.<sup>41</sup>

And trade unions are reaching out to prospective apprentices: In 2019, Unionlearn has launched a new app for smartphones and digital devices—**Apprenticeship Essentials**—aimed directly at them. It provides advice and guidance on their employment rights and training entitlements and also what their responsibilities are as apprentices. It features interactive tools, bite-sized learning modules, job search and much more, including information on access to trade union membership.

To illustrate different avenues of trade union engagement, the following three examples provide a snapshot overview:

- Canada’s national government has implemented a programme “to strengthen union-based apprenticeship training, innovation, and enhanced partnerships.” It provides funds to purchase equipment and materials for union-led training, as well as funding research on how to increase the number and quality of apprenticeships, with the involvement of unions. The Union Training and Innovation Program (UTIP) aims to both strengthen skills and training in Canada and improve diversity in the trades.<sup>42</sup> The program has already yielded positive results, such as a grant of more than \$200,000 USD to assist a carpenter’s union with a purchasing a forklift and other machinery for training apprentices.<sup>43</sup>
- In Australia, unions commonly negotiate for clauses in collective bargaining rounds which “either require employers to have a certain ratio of apprentices to tradespeople or which commit the employer to engage apprentices through group training arrangements.”<sup>44</sup> These agreements allow unions to support the growth of apprenticeship numbers while maintaining a role in the quality and diversity of the programs in collective agreements.
- In Denmark, apart from a recent national tri-partite agreement foreseeing to increase apprenticeship numbers, the Confederation of Danish Industry—in alliance with national unions such as 3F and HK—launched the ‘Hands-on’ campaign in 2013. It is aimed at potential apprentices and seeks to recruit them to internships in the metalworking industry. The campaign includes a website with information for young people

and parents as well as regular national and local events where employers meet potential apprentices.<sup>45</sup>

## Deep Dive: VET in Germany

Germany is known for its large high-quality apprenticeship system, which is based on equal employer/union involvement at all levels. At the national level, trade unions have equal representation with employers' organisations (eight members each) on the Board of the Federal Institute for Education and Training (BIBB).<sup>46</sup> Unions are central to decisions taken on the development and updating of training regulations for each occupational profile. Unions also have equal representation with employers' organisations on regional VET committees and on Committees of the 'Competency Bodies', which are responsible, *inter alia*, for monitoring apprenticeship training (supervising training institutions, assessing trainers, organising examinations) and providing advisory services for apprenticeship training.

Typically, German dual VET programmes are structured around 2 days per week in off the job training and 3 days on the job. There are around 325 apprenticeship frameworks negotiated between employers and the German Trade Union Confederation (DGB) and other sector unions. This is far fewer than in many other countries. The UK, for example, is seeking to reduce its number of frameworks to around 600.

Apprentices who sign a contract with an employer are considered workers and on this basis may join a trade union. Hence, apprentice pay is covered by sectoral or regional agreements. The rates vary accordingly, figures from the BIBB (2018) show the highest rate at an average of €1159 per month for an apprentice bricklayer and the lowest €584 for an apprentice hairdresser. The DGB supports the introduction of minimum standards for apprenticeships, including a minimum rate of pay and competence frameworks for trainers, which would include continuing training.

Union rights regarding information, consultation and co-determination, as well as rights on skill and training issues, are stipulated by the German *Works Constitution Act*<sup>47</sup>. Section 92 requires employers to inform the Works Council of employment needs and vocational training measures:

*"1. The employer and the works council shall promote the vocational training of the staff within the framework of the 'manpower planning' for the establishment and in collaboration with the bodies that are competent for vocational training and for the promotion of vocational training. At the request of the works council the employer shall determine the need for vocational training and consult it on matters relating to staff training. The Works Council may make relevant proposals.*

*"2. The employer and the Works Council shall ensure that employees are given an opportunity to participate in vocational training programmes inside or outside the establishment, having regard to the operational needs of the establishment. In this connection they shall also give due consideration to the interests of older employees, of part-time employees and of employees with family responsibilities."*

Section 97 continues:

*"1. The employer shall consult the works council on the establishment and equipment of in-plant training facilities, the introduction of vocational training programmes in the establishment and participation in external vocational training programmes.*

*"2. If the employer has planned or implemented measures as a result of which the work of the employees concerned is changed and their vocational knowledge and skills are no longer sufficient to discharge their duties, the works council shall participate in the decisions relating to the implementation of vocational training programmes in the establishment. Section 98 empowers the Works Council to oversee VET at the workplace."*

These legal rights translate into company rights, negotiated at Company Board level and applying to all company employees. One good example is the "Charter on Vocational Education and Training", within the Volkswagen Group, signed in June 2015 by the company Board, the Works Council and the Global Works Council (which include unions). The principles hence apply across all global company operations based on the Volkswagen Charter on Labour Relations: selection, quality, facilities and equipment, pay and other support, working time, holidays, transition from training to a job, and union representation. On the national level, the collective agreement on qualification for employees between the IG Metall and the Federation of the Metal and Electrical Industry in the south of Germany<sup>48</sup> from 2015 includes in particular an annual employee review regarding training needs. If there is a training need, suitable measures have to be devised.

Finally, as in many countries, young people are increasingly moving to university-based higher education rather than Vocational Education and Training (VET) tracks after graduating from secondary level education. Consequently, union and employer involvement increasingly extends to both. That might be one important reason why the number of dual study programmes has grown quickly over the last decade. In 2017, more than 100,000 students studied this model, which brings two partners together, usually a university of applied sciences and a company. Some dual study models include a double degree: a vocational training degree and a bachelor-degree. Other dual studies are both scientific and practical with qualifications in various disciplines and fin-



ish with just a bachelor's degree. Trade unions have already been able to negotiate a series of collective agreements for this format, including a training pay not lower than for apprentices in vocational educational training. However, there is still a long way to go to bring these kind of standards and regulations for dual studies on a national legal basis.

The German apprenticeship model displays a multi-level governance systems that provides equal rights and clear responsibilities to both social partners. It also classifies apprentices as workers and makes training an intrinsic part of collective national, sector and firm-level agreements.

## Training provisions in Global Framework Agreements (GFAs)

Multinational enterprises (MNEs) present a particular challenge for unions hoping to negotiate training rights and opportunities for workers along fragmented value chains because of their size and cross-border reach. Global framework agreements (GFAs) between MNEs and Global Union Confederations (GUFs) could provide an avenue to do so. These agreements work towards assuring workers' rights within subsidiaries and along global supply chains. However, on skills and training, this opportunity has not yet been fully leveraged. Even in the most comprehensive GFAs, MNE commitments to training are general rather than specific, including such phrases as “retraining programmes may be implemented”<sup>49</sup> and “[the company] affirms its commitment to anticipating, in so far as possible, job trends via a dynamic skills management programme.”<sup>50</sup>

Future GFAs could expand on this and include provisions with specific commitments to workers' training inside and outside the company (time, pay, certification, etc.). So, while it may be more difficult for GUFs to negotiate around skills ecosystems which are not international, being embedded in different country systems, GFAs are a promising avenue for firm-level training agreements with MNEs along their GVCs. The following is a selection of commitments on training from existing GFAs:

### **PSA Group (Peugot/Citroën) & IndustriALL (2017)**

<http://www.industrial-union.org>

The agreement states that “skills upgrading is key to the performance and development of the company and of each employee” and “the Group's ambition is to become a learning company” (p. 16). There is a full chapter on “Developing Skills and Employability”,

but no binding provisions on skills or training. There are commitments to support all employees in “professional development” (p. 14) and “the acquisition of new skills” (p. 15). “Retraining programmes may be implemented” (p. 15) if PSA Group deems it useful for their workers' “employability”. Referring to organisational changes, the agreement states: “It is essential to provide all employees with information on the prospects of their professions and, where necessary, any changes to prepare for and mobility to be considered” (p. 16).

### **Qatari Diar VINCI Construction/ VINCI & Building and Wood Workers' International (BWI) (2017)**

<https://www.vinci.com>

The agreement primarily covers occupational health and safety issues. A group composed of representatives from the union and the company is appointed to “consider developing a joint program for worker representatives on labour laws, occupational health and safety, the grievance mechanism and skills development” (p. 13). Additionally, “QDVC commits to a zero-accident policy, training workers on a regular basis with a view to improving health and safety conditions” (p. 9).

### **Total & IndustriALL (2015)**

<https://www.total.com>

“The parties to the present agreement recognize the need to promote among all employees a shared culture whose core components are skills management, incident feedback, lifelong learning, information and dialogue” (p. 7). Total commits to the “creation of direct or indirect local jobs by means of a suitable contracting policy combined with sustainable education and training programs” (p. 9). The agreement is in the process of being renewed; given the transformations happening in business and technology, efforts are being made by the signatories of the GFA for stronger provisions.

### **ABN AMRO Bank & UNI Global Union (2015)**

<https://www.abnamro.com>

“Parties agree that training is an important investment for both employees and for ABN AMRO. ABN AMRO undertakes to pursue a culture of continuous learning to enable its staff to develop their skills and wherever possible to satisfy their professional aspirations, and to fulfil the company's needs. All employees have the opportunity to participate in education and training to improve and update their occupational skills throughout their career at ABN AMRO” (p. 4).

### **Renault Group & IndustriALL (2019)**

<http://www.industriall-union.org>

A 2013 agreement between Renault and GUFs provided for some health and safety as well as diversity training. However, commitments to other types of training were limited. A 2019 update greatly improved on that foundation, stating that “*The dynamic and anticipatory management of competences, ... that is linked to dialogue between management representatives and representative trade unions and/or employee representatives on coming changes, is one of the major challenges to ensure that everybody is on top of his/her professional development. Furthermore, Renault Group confirms its willingness to involve representative trade unions and/or employee representatives in preparing for these changes.*” It lays out five drivers for the “*mobilisation and development of current and future employ-*

*ees’ potential*”: “*Dialogue on the evolution of the world of work, Collaborative management system, Sustainable commitment to inclusion, Work-life balance, [and] Adaptation of the working environment*” (p. 1). It also includes a section on implementation and follow-up, which provides for regular meetings between labour and management (p. 11).

### **Danone & International Union of Food workers (IUF) (2005)**

<https://ec.europa.eu>

“*In liaison with workers representatives, companies will try to anticipate changes in jobs and skills and will define training programs intended to maintain the level of skills required for jobs, and to help maintain its employees’ employability*” (p. 1 of EU summary).

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# Unions & Skills II

*Why social dialogue  
and collective bargaining  
matter for skills systems  
and training provision*

