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# **On-the-Job Training Program Concept Interviews**

## **Key Findings**

Prepared for the National Center for Education Statistics  
(NCES)

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## Introduction and Methodology

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) and the American Institutes for Research (AIR) have been working together to develop survey items to measure the prevalence and characteristics of work-related education and training among adults in the United States. In 2015, NCES expects to administer the Adult Training and Education Survey (ATES) on credentials and training for work as part of the National Household Education Study (NHES)<sup>1</sup>.

An important part of this development work has been efforts to measure the prevalence and characteristics of apprenticeships completed by adults in the United States. Initial work suggests apprenticeships are overreported by survey respondents. This may be due to respondent-driven error in thinking that they have completed an apprenticeship when they really have completed another type of formal on-the-job training program (such as an internship), or it may be driven by employers applying the term “apprenticeship” to a wider array of programs than traditionally have been considered apprenticeships. In order to assess these possibilities and address their implications for ATES item development, AIR conducted 12 “concept” interviews with individuals who had completed apprenticeships or other on-the-job training programs. The goal of these interviews was to better understand the characteristics of both apprenticeships and other types of on-the-job training programs. The interviews also aimed to identify the terminology that respondents used to describe such programs.

Interviews were conducted between December 30, 2013, and January 11, 2014. They lasted up to one hour. All interviews were conducted in English via the telephone. Respondents were required to have completed a formal on-the-job training program, such as an apprenticeship, internship, externship, student teaching, or residency. Respondents were recruited via Craigslist ads and personal contacts. Upon completion of the interview, respondents received a \$40 gift card in appreciation for their time.

The interviews were conducted by four interviewers who had received prior training on ATES content, interviewing, and note-taking conducted by experienced AIR researchers. These “concept” interviews were intended to be relatively unscripted conversations in which the interviewers determined the key characteristics of each respondent’s training program. Each interview began with an open-ended request for information about the program, followed by more specific probes aimed at capturing any details that were not initially mentioned by the respondent (see the appendix for the interviewer protocol). The interviews were recorded, and notes for each interview were written within 24 hours of its completion.

In reviewing the interview findings, it is important to keep in mind that a qualitative research methodology, such as these concept interviews, seeks to develop direction, rather than quantitatively precise or absolute measures. Because of the limited number of respondents involved in this type of research, the study should be regarded as exploratory in nature. The nonstatistical nature of qualitative research means the results cannot be generalized to the population under study with a known level of statistical precision.

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<sup>1</sup> Depending on the response rates achieved in the 2014 NHES Feasibility Study, NCES may elect to field the Credentials for Work Survey (CWS) consisting of a subset of ATES items.

## Key Findings

### Program Types and Fields

Of the 12 interviews that were completed, 3 respondents had completed an apprenticeship in a skilled trade, 3 had completed an apprenticeship for a different type of occupation, 2 had completed a student teaching program, 2 had completed an internship, 1 had completed a residency, and 1 had completed an associate program. The table below shows the program type and field reported by each respondent, as well as any alternate terminology provided by respondents during the interview.

Program Type	Quantity	Program Field	Alternate Terminology Mentioned by Respondent
Skilled trades apprenticeship	3	Electrical (2), HVAC – sheet metal	
Other apprenticeship	3	Environmental science, chemical operations safety, law	
Internship	2	Construction, nursing	Co-op, clinical experience, clinicals, practicum
Student teaching	2	Art, elementary education	Field experience
Residency	1	Medicine (physician)	
Associate program	1	Cosmetology	

### Length

Respondents typically reported their program length in terms of weeks, months, or years. There was a wide range of program lengths, ranging from 12 weeks to 5 years. The three skilled trades apprenticeships were the longest programs, with each lasting 4 or 5 years. The other apprenticeships were shorter, lasting 5 months, 11 months or 2 years. Most of the non-apprenticeship programs lasted 6 months or less, with the exception of the 2 medical programs which lasted 1.5 to 2 years. Most of the training programs were full-time for the duration of the training.

### Sponsor

Respondents reported a wide range of program sponsors including educational institutions, hospitals, the military, unions, and the company or organization where the respondent worked during their program. All of the skilled trades apprentices reported that their program was sponsored by a union. All of the other respondents reported that their program was sponsored either by the organization where they worked or the school they were attending during the program; there was not a noticeable difference between the reports for the other apprenticeships and those for the non-apprenticeship programs. Some of these respondents had trouble differentiating between the organization that provided the training and the organization (often a university) that made the training connection and provided support or credit.

## **Mentor**

All respondents had at least some type of support during the program. However, the degree of support varied widely, from daily interaction with a dedicated mentor to a shared group mentor or meeting on an as-needed basis. All of the skilled trades apprentices were mentored by a journeyman in their field. All of the other respondents were mentored by an experienced worker at the program site (e.g., artistic director, foreman, managing partner) or a professor from an associated educational program; there was not a meaningful difference between the reports for the other apprenticeships and the non-apprenticeship programs.

## **Training Structure**

Training programs varied in how “structured” the training was – some were simply work experience, while others appear to have had an underlying training plan (e.g., a sequence of training topics). In the more hands-on programs, mentors provided work assignments, guidance on how to succeed at these tasks, and feedback on the worker’s performance. Respondents also often reported spending time observing the work of more experienced workers at the training site. The skilled apprenticeships tended to be hands-on, while the respondents who completed the other types of programs reported more variation in how structured the training was.

## **Connection to Occupation**

Most of the respondents reported that the program was not explicitly required to work in the occupation. All of the skilled trades apprentices indicated that their apprenticeship was not required to work in the occupation, but that it was necessary for achieving journeyman status in that occupation. As an exception, the practical experience gained during some of the teaching and medical non-apprenticeship programs was reported as a requirement for working in these occupations, typically leading these respondents to be eligible to take their licensing exams.

Even among those who reported their program was not required, most indicated that completing this type of program was strongly encouraged by employers, thus giving the respondents the potential to get a better job in that occupation than if they had not completed the program.

## **Connection to a Specific Job Before/After Program Participation**

None of the respondents reported working at the training site prior to starting their training program. Although some of the respondents continued to work at the training site after completing the program, none of them specifically mentioned being guaranteed a job at the end of the program.

## **Connection to Certification and other Credentials**

Generally, program completion did not result in receipt of a certification or license. The respondents who had completed apprenticeships in skilled trades reported that licensure was completely separate from apprenticing; in these fields, workers could get a license without completing an apprenticeship. Completing the non-internship programs was at times a necessary precursor to being eligible for taking certification or licensure exams, particularly for teaching or medical programs.

All of the skilled trades apprentices received journeyman status upon completion of their program. Completing the other training programs typically did not result in any formal

credentials, although several respondents received a certificate noting that they had completed the program and some reported that completion of this program was a requirement for receiving their postsecondary degree. There was not a meaningful difference between the reports of the respondents who completed the other apprenticeships and the non-apprenticeship programs.

### **Connection to Educational Program, Coursework, or Exams**

About half of the programs were completed while the respondent was pursuing a postsecondary degree. This was much more common among the non-apprenticeship programs and the other apprenticeship programs (two-thirds of each) than it was among the skilled trades apprenticeships (none). Only 3 of the programs were *required* for completing a degree program; all of these were non-apprenticeship programs.

Almost all of the training programs included some type of coursework, even if this was somewhat informal in some cases (e.g., CEU courses provided primarily to regular employees at the training site, a lecture given by an industry leader, a monthly group discussion of relevant journal articles). The extent of the formal coursework ranged considerably, from 3 hours per week for one semester, to 3 months of full-time class, to 8 hours of class every 2 weeks for 3 years. All of the skilled trades apprenticeships included formal coursework provided by the training provider (e.g., at a training center run by the union, taught by journeymen). Only one-third of the other programs included formal coursework, and these were all non-apprenticeship programs that were required for completing a degree program.

All of the respondents had their performance evaluated in some way during the program. Several of them mentioned having to pass at least one exam or write a report as part of their program; some of these were written exams, while others were practical exams. All of the skilled trades apprenticeships included exams. Almost all of the non-apprenticeship programs included an exam, formal observation, or final report. Only 1 of the 3 other apprentices mentioned having a formal evaluation.

### **Requirements for Completion**

Requirements for completing the program varied. Some respondents had to have a generally favorable review from their employer, while others had to pass specific tests, demonstrate particular skills, receive a passing grade in associated courses, or complete a certain number of hours of training. All of the skilled trades apprentices reported having to pass an exam and to complete a certain number of hours of training or on-the-job experience. The other types of programs were not likely to have a specific number of hours required; these respondents were more likely to report more general length requirements, such as it being expected that they would work full time for a 3-month period. As mentioned above, most of the non-apprenticeship programs required successfully completing some type of evaluation, such as an exam, observation, or paper, but this was less likely to be true among the other apprenticeships.

### **Costs**

Costs associated with the program varied by respondent, with some respondents reporting no costs at all. Reported costs included tuition for associated courses, textbooks, work materials or tools, and union dues. Among each of the subgroups of respondents (skilled trades apprenticeships, other apprenticeships, and non-apprenticeship programs), there was not a clear

pattern as to the types of expenses reported. Among the skilled trades apprentices, two reported paying union dues, one paying for text books, and one paying exam fees. Two of the 3 other apprentices reported having no costs, while the third had to pay tuition for courses associated with the program. Among the non-apprenticeship programs, 3 reported paying tuition for associated courses, 3 reported having to pay for work materials or tools, and one reported no costs. The respondents whose training program was part of an educational program (as opposed to completing courses as part of a training program) were not consistent as a group in whether or not they reported the cost of these courses.

## **Wages**

About three-fourths of the respondents reported receiving some type of wage. Among those who did receive wages, the type of reported pay depended on the training program: a stipend, free housing, a training wage that increased over time, or the same wage as an entry-level worker. All of the skilled trades apprentices reported receiving a lower training salary that increased over time and was tied to a percentage of a journeyman's salary. There was not a clear pattern to the pay structure of the other apprenticeships: one was unpaid, one received a stipend and free room and board, and the third received the same pay as a trained worker. The non-apprenticeship programs were the most likely to be unpaid (3 out of 6 programs); those that were paid reported that their salaries were lower than what a trained worker would receive.

## **Benefits to Participants**

Respondents in each of the 3 subgroups of programs mentioned several benefits to participating in these programs, including getting real-life experiences and skills that they could not get in a classroom, getting a chance to see if they enjoy working in a certain occupation, giving them more confidence in their skills, and helping them get a job – either through contacts made during the program or because they are able to show that they have practical experience.

## Appendix: Interviewer Protocol

*Note: Beyond the initial introduction, these are intended to be relatively unscripted interviews which should feel like an informal conversation with the interviewee about their work-related training experience (apprenticeship, externship, internship, or student teaching).*

Hello, [interviewee name]. This is [interviewer name] from the American Institutes for Research in Washington, DC. Thank you for taking the time to speak with me today. As we mentioned in our earlier conversations, we are working with the U.S. Department of Education to develop a survey that will describe adult's education and training experiences. We are interested in speaking with you today because you mentioned earlier that you [brief description of formal work training experience].

We'd like to speak with you about this experience for about an hour today. As a thank you for your help, we will be sending a \$40 gift card to you after the completion of the interview. Because it would be hard to keep track of everything you say today, we would like to audio record this interview. Is that okay with you? [IF SO, START RECORDING] [IF NOT OKAY WITH RECORDING: Okay, that's no problem.]

I'd also like to take notes while we are talking, so you might hear me typing while we are talking.

I want you to know that your participation is voluntary and your responses are protected from disclosure by federal statute [US code title 20, section 9573]. All responses that relate to or describe identifiable characteristics of individuals may be used only for statistical purposes and may not be disclosed, or used, in identifiable form for any other purpose, unless otherwise compelled by law. We want you to know that you can speak freely. Also, you do not have to answer any question you don't want to and can stop the interview at any time if you wish.

Okay, let's get started. First, I'd like to know a bit more about your [apprenticeship/externship/internship/residency/student teaching] – can you describe it to me? How was it structured, how long did it last, and why did you participate in it?

[Specific topics to cover, probe as needed]

- What type of occupation was this [apprenticeship/externship/internship/residency/student teaching] for?
- Is this [apprenticeship/externship/internship/residency/student teaching] required to work in that occupation?
  - [IF NOT]: Is it encouraged by employers?
- Do you know who sponsored, ran or supported the [program? Was a state government or the federal government involved? Was a labor union involved?
  - How did you first learn about the program? How did you get into the program? Why did you participate in it?



- Was participating in this program connected to an education program? If yes, please explain. [What kind of education program? Was it a required part of the education program?]
- Where did you work during this [apprenticeship/externship/internship/residency/student teaching]?
  - What was the name of the place you worked?
  - What kind of company/organization was that?
  - Were you working there before you began the [apprenticeship/externship/internship/residency/student teaching] or did you start working there at the beginning of the program?
- When did you start this [apprenticeship/externship/internship/residency/student teaching]?
- How long did it last?
  - Ask about duration (weeks/months year)
  - Ask about number of hours spent in instruction/training/etc. per week and total
- How were you trained during this [apprenticeship/externship/internship/residency/student teaching]? How did you learn to do your job?
- Did you have a mentor or advisor during this [apprenticeship/externship/internship/residency/student teaching]?
  - What was his or her title? What was his or her day-to-day job at [place/company]?
  - Tell me a bit about the types of support you received from this person.
- Did you take any formal classes as part of this [apprenticeship/externship/internship/residency/student teaching], either on-line or in-person? Who provided these courses? Where did you take them?
- Were there any fees or costs associated with this [apprenticeship/externship/internship/residency/student teaching] that you had to pay?
- Were you paid while you were taking part in the [apprenticeship/externship/internship/residency/student teaching]? What kind of pay did you get—for example, was it the same level of pay as other workers in this field, or a lower level training pay?
  - Did your pay increase as you progressed through the [apprenticeship/externship/internship/residency/student teaching]?
  - Did you receive a raise when you completed the program?
- What was required for you to complete this program?
  - PROBE: Did you need to demonstrate any particular skills or pass a test? Did you need to be in the program for a certain amount of time?
  - [IF YES]: Tell me more about the content and format of the test/who evaluated your performance and how/the time requirements]
- Did completing the program result in a credential that you could use with one or more employers? Tell me about this credential. (name of it, who recognizes it, did it involved other requirements beyond the program, could you have gotten it without completing the program?)
  - [IF YES]: Do you remember who issued this credential?
- Was completion of this program necessary in order to get a certification or license?
- Was a job guaranteed at the completion of the program?

- To what extent is the program a probationary trial period of work as opposed to a training program?
- What were the main benefits of completing this [apprenticeship/externship/internship/residency/student teaching]?

Thank you very much for providing so much detail about your [apprenticeship/externship/internship/residency/student teaching]. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about that experience that you haven't had a chance to mention?

Okay, thank you again for taking the time to provide us with this useful information.