



English summary
of Fafo-rapport 2022:01

Evaluation of the tripartite industry programme for competence development

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The tripartite industry programme for competence development is an element in the *Lære hele livet* [Lifelong learning] educational reform. The objective of the programme is to ensure that employees in industries and sectors with special competence needs obtain the skills required to cope with restructuring and remain employed. Moreover, it is intended to increase participation in continuing and further education, especially among employees with few formal skills.

Initially, the tripartite industry programme was aimed at the municipal health and care sector and the manufacturing and construction industries. Funding was first granted in 2019, and the training options were scheduled to be established in the spring of 2020. When the coronavirus pandemic hit Norway in March 2020, the programme was expanded to include other industries, and by the end of 2020 it encompassed ten industries including the two original ones.

This report presents an evaluation of the two initial industry programmes, i.e. municipal health and care and the manufacturing and construction industries. Following the establishment of further programmes in 2020, the scope of the evaluation was expanded to include three more programmes: tourism, retail trade and the electrical, automation, renewable energy and power supply industry. The evaluation thereby encompasses five of the ten industry programmes.

The objective of the evaluation has been to assess the extent to which social partnership functions as a tool to develop suitable interventions and encourage participation in competence development, including whether tripartite industry programmes represent an appropriate form of intervention to achieve the goal of providing everybody with the skills required to cope with restructuring and remain employed. More specifically, we ask: How has the collaboration between the actors involved in the industry programme functioned? To what extent have the programmes succeeded in recruiting businesses and employees to participate in the competence development projects on offer? To what extent do the participants complete their training, and what kinds of skills do they acquire?

These questions were the basis for the evaluation of the two initial programmes and they also guided the evaluation of the added programmes, with some reservations. The structure of the industry programmes that were established during the pandemic differed slightly from the two initial ones. The target groups for the added programmes also included persons who had been laid off or were unemployed. While the two initial programmes were characterised by development work and establishment of training options based on the industries' assess-

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ments of their need for skills, the programmes established during the pandemic were designed under far tighter time constraints. They were far less oriented towards development and focused more on facilitation of existing training opportunities.

To answer the questions, we have relied on a combination of various data sources and methodological approaches: desk studies and qualitative interviews with key actors, programme board members, training providers, businesses and participants, as well as a survey among participants.

Industry programmes as a form of collaboration

The impression from the first two industry programmes, municipal health and care and the manufacturing and construction industries, is that they have the character of development projects, in which the social partners in collaboration with businesses and local parties identified competence shortfalls and established new training options in collaboration with educational institutions.

The industry programmes that were developed during the coronavirus pandemic faced a different situation. There was less time to identify competence shortfalls and develop new projects. The programme board members had to make use of their own knowledge about the industry and their familiarity with different training opportunities. The programme boards describe the programmes as a kind of crisis management initiative, the objective of which was to rapidly establish training options that particularly targeted those who had been laid off or were unemployed. On the other hand, the programme boards emphasise the importance for their efforts that a structure for how an industry programme should function was already in place. Their experience was that the structure and collaborative framework that had been established for the initial programmes could be rapidly mobilised when the pandemic hit Norway. The programme board members describe the collaboration between the social partners and the authorities in positive terms. However, the report points out that using industry programmes as a policy instrument can be challenging in industries with a low unionisation rate among both employees and employers. In such industries, it may be a challenge for the partners to learn about the industry's competence needs and to mobilise businesses and participants.

Target groups and recruitment

Our data show that the industry programmes have reached their target group, i.e. employees who have few formal skills and rarely participate in continuing and further education. This is most obvious in the municipal health and care services, but also in the retail trade sector. In the latter two industries, the programme was also able to recruit persons who were laid off or unemployed and who were included in the programmes' target group.

The number of participants recruited to the different programmes varied considerably. Of the added programmes, tourism in particular has recruited widely and had the highest number of participants by far. This could to some extent be explained by the high rate of unemployment and lay-offs in this industry, which also employs many young people. Many of them may also have wanted to formalise their skills to strengthen their position in an uncertain job market.

Implementation and competence enhancement

Our knowledge varies about the implementation of the training programmes and the skills that the participants have acquired. We have some information about the two initial programmes and somewhat less about those that were added later. Our interviews indicate that the municipal health and care sector and the manufacturing and construction industry programmes have had a high rate of completion. As regards the other programmes, the data are less detailed. The providers of the training programmes that were added during the pandemic report that a number of short courses were established with a low threshold for admission, but also a high rate of attrition.

As regards exams, many of the training providers note that some of the participants were more interested in topping up their skills than in sitting the exam as such. It is noted, however, that the retail trade certificate, which traditionally has been of lesser importance, has now increased in attractiveness among both employers and employees.

The survey undertaken among the participants also shows that many have chosen to participate in training programmes that can provide formal skill certificates, including in industries where there is little tradition for employees to attend training courses.

Results and goal achievement

Based on our data, the training courses in the added programmes appear to have met the needs of the industries involved. They seem to have captured those who have wanted to strengthen their own position in their existing workplace as well as in the labour market in general.

The programme in the municipal health and care sector has succeeded in establishing two training options that otherwise would not have been realised. The courses have been fully booked and have been able to reach a group of employees who rarely attend training courses. In the manufacturing industry, which has a long-standing tradition for social partnership collaboration on training programmes, even more attention has been paid to the needs of businesses in the joint design of the training content. The added programmes, especially in tourism, but also to some extent in retail trade, have been able to reach partici-

pants who have few formal skills and otherwise might not have participated in further and ongoing education.

If the industry programmes are to be continued as a skills policy instrument, it needs to be decided whether the authorities and the social partners at the central level should provide instructions regarding the groups and types of options that the industry programmes should prioritise, or whether the industries involved ought to be able to decide this more or less independently. There are arguments in favour of prioritising groups with little formal education, as well as training programmes that could provide these groups with formalised skills. Such groups are essentially more vulnerable to exclusion from the labour market during periods of restructuring, and formal training highlights their skills to a greater extent than non-formal types of training.

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