

VocATE: A Pilot Programme Evaluation – November 2018



Aim of the Pilot Programme: VocATE is an apprenticeship scheme which aims to pair Small Business Owners (SBOs) with individuals who would not, for reasons of expense, lack of connections, or without support, otherwise have the opportunity to gain on the job training and complete an apprenticeship. On completion of the 3-year apprenticeship, each participant will be equipped with the necessary skills and knowhow to apply for a Business Development grant from ATE and create a sustainable business and income for themselves and their family. There is extremely limited job market available for skilled workers in Lawra, which makes acceptance into ATE's business development programme on completion of the apprenticeship very important.

Objectives of VocATE:

- 1) Facilitate apprenticeship between willing Trainer and trainee with agreed terms;
- 2) Remove barriers to entering and undertaking apprenticeship with financial support;
- 3) Support apprentice to continue training to completion of apprenticeship;
- 4) Successful application of VocATE graduates into ATE's BizATE programme.

Aim of evaluation: To better understand the challenges experienced by apprentices during the apprenticeship, and identify ways in which ATE can better support and facilitate the learning process and completion of apprenticeships going forward.

Background: Lawra Municipal in the Upper West Region of Ghana has the highest poverty incidence in Ghana. This is a cause and consequence of the limited employment opportunities available for the almost 55,000 people who live in the area. Challenges in accessing and

completing basic education cause adult literacy rates to languish at just 19% and creating a reliance on subsistence farming for the majority of the population (83%).¹ A long dry season and single rainy season (June – September) creates chronic food shortages for the people of Lawra and reinforces the cycle of poverty.

VocATE: A Pilot Programme: Life in Lawra can be difficult with many challenges but given the opportunity and support, people work hard to better their situation and create a stable and sustainable future for themselves and their families. To provide this opportunity to young, unskilled and out of work individuals, ATE launched a vocational training programme, VocATE, in 2016 as an organic development of our business development programme, BizATE. It is a pilot programme that was suggested to ATE by locals in Lawra during an evaluation of our Business Development programme, BizATE, in 2016.²

Apprenticeships in Ghana are unpaid and have a recommended duration of 2-4 years. On discussion with interested SBOs in Lawra Town, a 3-year programme was agreed with a specific set of skills to be taught and mastered during that time. Successful applicants to the programme were paired with an SBO in their chosen vocation, and a contract was agreed and signed between the two parties and ATE. Over the course of their learning, an ATE Project Assistant has visited each apprentice at their place of business for a monthly monitoring visit. On this visit, the progression of skill was recorded as well as any challenges with their work, including absenteeism, lateness to work, ill health, etc.

As 7 of the 10 apprentices enter their final year, their acquisition of skill should be nearly complete, with the focus now being on mastering skills to a level where they can work independently and unsupervised. On completion of the apprenticeship, each participant will be fast tracked into ATE’s business development programme, BizATE. This will give them the opportunity to apply for a grant to start up their own business, receive tailored and ongoing business training and be paired with an ATE mentor to support them through the first year of their business.

Glossary

Apprentice	Trainee undertaking unpaid, vocational learning through VocATE.
Trainer	Small Business Owner (SBO) paired with ATE apprentice to provide training in a vocation. Referred to as ‘Master’ in Ghana.
VocATE Project Assistant	ATE staff member (in Lawra) who monitors apprenticeship.

¹ [Lawra - UN Human Development Report 2010.pdf](#)

² [ATE - BizATE Evaluation 2016.pdf](#)

Recommendations

- To continue monitoring graduates of the VocATE programme on a quarterly or twice yearly basis, to track progress and development beyond the apprenticeship;
- Uniform requirements to be reviewed on a yearly basis, effective immediately and implemented for future VocATE apprentices;
- Small, monthly allowance provided to apprentices to cover: practice materials, equipment repairs, replacement material, uniform repairs, or food. Alternatively, a yearly granting system could be considered (as with ATE-supported dry Season Farmers), particularly for equipment requirements;
- Regular, monthly meeting held bringing all VocATE participants and an ATE Project Assistant together at the start of the programme to provide peer-peer support and as an opportunity to provide quarterly workshops on key topics including numeracy, women's empowerment and women's health;
- Monitor status of Technical, Vocational and Education Training Centre to be opened in Lawra;
- Develop a VocATE handbook and provide 'Refresher' training to the ATE staff member responsible for monitoring VocATE;
- Separate training provided at the start of the programme to trainers and apprentices on the use of skills tracker as a learner tool;
- Dovetail ATE programmes and pair apprentices with SBOs who have participated in BizATE where possible;
- Replicate pilot programme with a second cohort of apprentices.
- Bi-annual access to a bicycle repairman



Evaluation: In the VocATE programme there are 10 apprentices and 10 trainers, each were interviewed for this evaluation. The key areas to evaluate and with recommendations to arise were:

- **Monitoring and mentoring**
- **Challenges**
- **Exams**
- **Considerations in Small Business selection**
- **Considerations in apprentice selection**

Monitoring: The purpose of monthly visits is to track acquisition of skill and facilitate the learning process for successful completion of the apprenticeship, predominantly achieved by monitoring and mediating issues as they arise.

On each visit, the VocATE Project Assistant is asked to record the progression in skills that had been agreed with the trainers at the beginning of the apprenticeship. The skills tracker was developed with SBOs for the purpose of ATE monitoring only, however, it could also function as a learning aid by the trainer or the apprentice if this was encouraged. Skill progression is assessed by the Project Assistant through conversation with the Trainer. Although trainers working with the programme did not report the skill tracker to be useful to them or something they would consider adopting with other apprentices, the process in itself has been reported as incentivising to both the trainer and apprentice.

Testimony from other organisations has acknowledged that there is a practice among some trainers to intentionally keep apprentices at junior level, in order to delay the completion of the apprentice and maximise the window of increased productivity and profit.³ This is something that regular monitoring of skill progression mitigates, with several ATE apprentices claiming that it encourages their trainer to continue to teach new skills and styles ahead of monitoring visits. Equally, most trainers believed the monitoring visits encouraged ATE apprentices to be serious with their learning, making them preferable trainees in comparison to non-ATE apprentices working at the same business.

“I tell my apprentice that if she is late, I will inform ATE. It encourages her to come early” Trainer

By and large, apprentices in the programme are acquiring skill at a similar pace, which positively reinforces the skill tracker ATE has developed. However, in instances where apprentices are not learning skills within the timeframe of a 3 year apprenticeship (e.g. Trainee not introduced to a skill recognised as taking 2 years to master when entering their final year of the programme) it does not appear as though action is taken on the part of the VocATE Project Assistant to understand or reconcile this. It may be necessary to introduce ‘refresher’ training to the monitoring forms, particularly when there is turnover in staff and a new staff member takes on responsibility for the programme. The development of a VocATE handbook would also be useful to facilitate the programme and support the VocATE Project Assistant.

It was widely reported that the monitoring visits were most valued when the VocATE Project Assistant adopted the role of mediator. One apprentice claimed that without ATE she would have been let go a long time ago. Another apprentice reported the key role ATE played in

³ <https://www.poverty-action.org/study/returns-apprenticeship-training-ghana>
UK Registered Charity: 1149988

convincing her husband of the value of vocational learning and his subsequent consent for her joining the programme.

“Firms may also seek to retain apprentices at a skill level that is profitable for the business but makes them less than employable elsewhere.”⁴

It is without a doubt that the regular visits to the apprentice at their place of work (it cannot always be guaranteed that trainers will also be available) serve an important role in facilitating the apprenticeship and that it has often required ATE to take steps outside the original remit of the programme. For example, holistic care, support during serious illnesses and representing the interests of apprentices during family disputes. This has ensured that apprentices have been supported on an as-needed basis in order to continue their training. This was a key objective of the VocATE Pilot Programme.

Challenges: Ghanaian apprenticeships can be incredibly challenging with little support. Working 6-days a week, up to 10 hours a day, leaves little time for other responsibilities or activities. The challenges this causes are exacerbated by the long duration of Ghanaian apprenticeships and compounded by the lack of earning capacity during this time and the ongoing costs associated with the process.

ATE facilitated entry into the 10 apprenticeships by covering some of the financial burdens, including fee to the trainer, equipment requirements and uniform costs. Family of apprentices were also asked to make a contribution to these costs to demonstrate their support. These one-off payments were exceptionally important in enabling apprentices to start the learning process, without which the training would have been unattainable. The apprentices are very grateful to ATE for their support in this.

However, there are ongoing financial requirements that apprentices must cover. Where the financial support of family is not possible it is unrealistic for apprentices to cover these costs themselves.

Ongoing costs include:

- Practice materials
- Equipment repairs
- Uniform repairs/replacements
- Food

Practice materials: Expenditure on practice materials varies according to trade. Seamstresses seem to be in the hardest category. Practice materials must be bought regularly to develop skills and apprentices reported that different fabrics were also required (which varied cost) because the different fabrics require different skillsets. Without access to materials on which to practise regularly apprentices wait longer to be tasked with customer items by the master. Therefore, prolonging the period you must provide your own materials to practice, limiting advancement in the apprenticeship and being retained at a junior level.

⁴ <https://www.poverty-action.org/study/returns-apprenticeship-training-ghana>
UK Registered Charity: 1149988

If seamstresses are able to afford materials, the benefit is that they can practice new styles, progress through their apprenticeship and create outfits for themselves and their family. Unfortunately, some seamstresses can only afford a material called 'Bread Flour'. This is a cheap material that is either very thin, or very thick, low quality, and printed with large logos. Although this fabric is more accessible, no one will wear the clothes made from such low quality fabric making the finished products useless. It has also been reported that Bread Flour damages the sewing machines.

To practice different sewing styles and cutting, some seamstresses will use scrap fabric to make miniature dresses. While this provides the opportunity to practice again, the end product cannot be used.

When asked how much fabric would be ideal to practice on, seamstresses varied in their answers but there was a consensus on how much material was required to make one outfit: 3 yards. Although prices vary according to style and quality of fabric it seems that 30 - 40 GHS a month would purchase enough fabric of reasonable quality to make one outfit.



Lawrencia and Janet with their learning aids

Out of the two hairdressing apprentices in VocATE, both use a learning aid, however there was a great variation in price and both learning aids are now almost completely defunct and in need of replacement. Janet Kuukpeng spent 40 GHS on a child's doll and Lawrencia Nyetaa's father spent 100 GHS on a hairdressing doll. Although these learning aids are important for skill development, they can only be used to practice cornrows, which is limiting.

There is only one apprentice learning weaving and she claims not to need practice materials. All the material she needs are either covered by her trainer or paid for by the customers.

An important bearing on the amount of practice material required, and the skill development of an apprentice, is the level of trade and location of the business. If the shop is in town it will be busy with customers providing apprentices will ample opportunity to learn and progress with skills. However, businesses just a few minutes out of the town centre are drastically quieter. In these circumstances, apprentices must have access to appropriate practice materials because the lack of trade seriously reduces their opportunity to learn and advance.

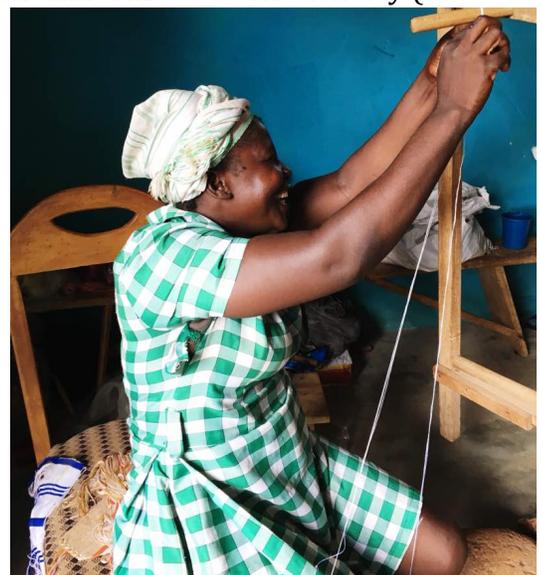
Equipment repairs: ATE's support facilitating apprenticeships included assisting in equipment costs. Again, this varies according to vocation and is particularly a concern for seamstresses who have higher ongoing equipment requirements over the course of their apprenticeship. Many apprentices (particularly seamstresses) reported that the original equipment granted to them is now rundown or broken through overuse. Seamstresses noted tape measures and the teeth in their sewing machine (used to pass material through the machine) as items in particular need of replacement. With items such a thread, these must be purchased regularly, with apprentices responsible for the cost rather than the business owner. One apprentice relied on the tools of a senior apprentice for 9 months until she could afford a replacement.

More stringent monitoring of equipment with a well-implemented budget for ongoing maintenance would better facilitate the learning process, particularly for vocations where equipment is vital to their work.

7 apprentices received subsidised bicycles through ATE's collaboration with Village Bicycle Project (VBP) in 2018, to reduce time and energy spent travelling to work, and thus improving punctuality. This has worked very well. Repair techniques were taught by VBP but apprentices have found this ineffectual without the appropriate tools. It is suggested that ATE covers the cost of repairs to bikes on an annual, or bi-annual basis, to make the best use of the bikes.

Uniform repairs/replacements: ATE provided funds for each trainer to purchase a minimum of 2 uniforms per apprentice, with some apprentices receiving 3 uniforms (depending on cost of fabric/style required). Apprentices are expected to wear their uniforms to work each day (6 days a week), however it appears to be imposed more strictly by some business owners than others. For example, when one apprentice uniform began to tear she was sent home until she could afford repairs. Maintaining uniform then becomes a potential barrier to learning. More regular monitoring of uniform with a small budget for repairs would assist ease of learning while providing dignity and sense of wellbeing for apprentices.

Food: Apprentices work on average 8am - 6pm, 6 days a week and business owners are not obliged to provide any food during working hours. During this evaluation it was difficult to discern how most apprentices were managing to feed themselves day to day. However, support from some trainers was evident: Grace Munya, trainer to Patricia Pokum, was the only trainer to regularly provide



Wear and tear visible in the uniform.

food to support her apprentices; while two apprentices claimed that their Trainers would feed them by providing food but on an irregular basis. Alternatively, another apprentice complained that she was hungry and had no food to eat. It is assumed apprentices do not regularly eat during the day, but eat at home with their family. Unfortunately, one trainee reported that her family stopped supporting her with food holding the belief that ATE should provide for her as they facilitated her apprenticeship, which is a concern.

The issue with food and hunger has been a concern throughout the pilot programme but remains difficult to resolve. The majority of ATE supported apprentices work in businesses with other apprentices, some with as many as 10 others in the same business. When the issue of whether ATE should provide food has arisen before, it has been decided that it is too complicated when there are so many non-VocATE apprentices that we are unable to support in the same way. It could cause friction/conflict if ATE supported apprentices were seen to be singled out for benefit within the same workplace.



To alleviate some of the above challenges, it is suggested that apprentices are awarded a small monthly allowance. This can be spent on practise materials, uniform upkeep, equipment repairs or replacement, or food, at the apprentice's discretion. This would go some way to resolving each of the four challenges discussed above while allowing each apprentice control over which needs they find most pressing. For example, 30 - 40 GHS per month for each of the 10 apprentices currently supported would cost ca. £600 - £800 a year.

Further consideration in the programme: Ongoing monitoring and interviews for this evaluation have revealed several more areas that need to be considered for the final year of apprenticeship as well with consideration to future trainee/trainer selections.

Exams: In order to graduate from their apprenticeship, apprentices are expected to take an exam, usually at the end of their 3 years, but it is at the discretion of their trainer to decide when they are ready. However there was a lot of misinformation and uncertainty about when exams take place, how much they cost and who organises them. The majority of apprentices believed that exams were organised by the Association of Apprentices for the Upper West Region, held in Lawra Post Office in September/October 2019, and costing between 180 – 300 GHS. It was also believed that each apprentice would have to provide materials to the examiner ahead of the exam and at their own cost.

There was also variation concerning the outcome if the exam is not passed: This ranged from waiting to re-sit the following year, to being able to start a business without passing the exam. One apprentice believed that she would not be able to sit the exam set by The Association of Apprentices for the Upper West Region because of the support she has received from ATE. It is strongly recommended that ATE investigate further to reassure the apprentices about what is to happen and take action appropriately. It is also recommended that ATE covers the exam cost for first exam sittings.



Considerations for trainee selection: When selecting the next group of individuals for the VocATE programme, there are certain lessons that can be learnt from the experiences of ATE's current cohort. For example, care must continue to be taken to fully and clearly explain ATE's role in facilitating the learning process to the apprentices, their families and the SBOs.

Assumptions about ATE have in cases worsened circumstances for apprentices. For one apprentice, her family believed that as the organisation facilitating the apprenticeship, ATE should take responsibility for other needs, including food and money. Family poverty, lack of family support and their expectations of ATE made the continuation of the apprenticeship difficult and caused frequent family and workplace issues for this individual. Thankfully she is making excellent progress and is on track to complete her apprenticeship. However, it is important for ATE to learn from this example and ensure a similar situation is avoided in the future.

Since 2016, 4 apprentices have dropped out of the programme after becoming pregnant. This is difficult to mitigate and if an apprentice does become pregnant, in ATE's experience, it has not been possible for the learning process to continue largely due to locally held practices/beliefs concerning pregnancy. This is likely to continue being a challenge.

However, it should be noted that it is common for working mothers to bring their children to work with them while breastfeeding. Something several ATE supported apprentices have done. This has not caused any impediment to the learning process and ATE would continue to support this arrangement if it is required for future applicants. Given this, it is recommended that in future selections, those who dropped out of the pilot programme and now have young children should be given first refusal on the second round of VocATE placements.

It was unintentional that the full cohort in the pilot programme was women only. During the next selection process for apprentices, the programme will continue to be open to men and women and ATE will give consideration to all vocations presented.

Considerations for SBO selection: During the first SBO selection process there was considerable difficulty in finding willing trainers to take part. However we are optimistic the positive feedback from SBOs involved in our pilot programme will encourage greater participation. As much as possible we should seek SBOs who have been supported by the BizATE programme as the existing strong relationship and trust will be an asset.

It must be part of the vetting process of potential trainers and businesses, to measure the level of trade they experience. For example, this might be gaged by making several visits to the business to assess the level of activity. This will include how many other apprentices they take on as well as where the business is located. When visiting apprentices on placement even a short distance out of town, apprentices were often found by themselves with no work to do. One apprentice claimed her business only received customers on Fridays and Saturdays. It is important that there is enough trade for apprentices to develop skills and confidence at a reasonable pace.

It is a concern that some SBOs in the VocATE programme have taken on an apprentice to take over their own workload rather than as a means to grow their business. There is strong

potential for exploitation in Ghanaian apprentice. It is ATE's aim to mitigate this as best as possible and ATE should ensure that apprentices are used to grow and strengthen businesses and are not only viewed as free labour.

Support Groups: It has been suggested by ATE Project Assistants to offer regular meetings (monthly or quarterly) for all ATE apprentices. This is considered to be of particular importance at the start of apprenticeships where adapting to the regimes and getting used to new challenges can be particularly burdensome, especially for younger trainees. It provides an opportunity for new trainees to get to know each other, share their experiences, benefit from peer-to-peer support and learning, provides a platform to raise concerns with ATE, as well as a platform for ATE to address important or common issues, and importantly it allows trust to develop between ATE and new apprentices quickly.

In the VocATE pilot, the holistic support required to facilitate the learning process was greater than expected and we adapted our approach to accommodate this. It is believed that regular support groups among the apprentices would provide better support and might serve to mitigate issues before they develop into more challenging problems.

Support groups could also serve as workshops: for example, poor numeracy skill was mentioned by one trainer as their biggest challenge when teaching new apprentices. By providing a workshop in basic numeracy the learning process would be supported as well as boosting the skills of the apprentice as a future business owner. As the apprentices in the pilot programme were all women it is also recommended that meetings could be used to discuss women's empowerment and Women's Health. ATE has recently started delivering Support for Girls workshops to girls at ATE supported schools and we believe much of this would be helpful and empowering to female apprentices. As an organisation, we are aware of the demand for improved numeracy, literacy and greater female empowerment in the community and it will be important to access what level of support would be required to make these workshops effective to the VocATE programme without detracting from the key aims.

Vocational Learning Schools: During a recent visit to Lawra, President Nana Akufo-Addo announced the opening of 20 Technical, Vocational and Education Training Centres in Ghana⁵, promising Lawra as the location for one of them. ATE wants to provide support in the most efficient means possible and never intends to duplicate support available. It is therefore recommended that ATE monitors this development in case it alters our approach to vocational learning support in the future. For example, we may choose to cover the entrance fee to the vocation learning school and support graduates with BizATE grants.

Conclusion: Although still in the process of their vocational learning, the apprentices are grateful for the support given to them by ATE, with 7/10 without work or prospects for work before being enrolled in VocATE. They see VocATE as the means by which they will be able to improve themselves, gain independence and earn an income that can support their families. Ghanaian apprenticeships can appear harsh or gruelling, however, each apprentice is willing to

⁵ 12.11.2018: <http://www.peacefmonline.com/pages/local/news/201811/367587.php>

undertake these temporary challenges in order to gain economic sustainability in the long term, along with the benefits this affords.

As we recruit new trainees to join VocATE, we must bear in mind that different trades present different requirements and considerations and endeavour to provide tailored support to best facilitate the learning process. We should strive to provide equal opportunities for success, which can be measured in stringent vetting of potential SBOs. Most notably measuring the level



of trade a business enjoys, whether the business owner is seeking to grow their business, and how many other apprentices the trainer is responsible for. Equally stringent vetting must continue to be applied when securing potential trainees, with particular regard to their existing support unit.

Apprenticeships are an important tool for developing a community in a meaningful and sustainable way; it empowers the community by creating skills that can be used to generate income and contribute towards sustainable economic growth in the long term. Apprentices in the VocATE Pilot Programme have worked hard, overcoming challenges in pursuit of a better, more sustainable future. Mentoring has been an important element in facilitating the long learning process and it will continue to be a vital aspect as apprentices graduate from the VocATE programme and move into ATE's Business Development Programme, BizATE. The success of graduates in BizATE will be a further measure in evaluating the success of VocATE.