



Myers JDC  
Brookdale

# **STARTER Program – Vocational Training through Apprenticeship Final Research Report**

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# Abstract

## Background

The STARTER Program – Vocational Training through Apprenticeship is based on an innovative model introduced in Israel, which offers participants theoretical studies at a vocational training institute along with a paid practical apprenticeship in the workplace. The program is designed to help participants learn a trade needed in the labor market and, at the same time, to assist employers in recruiting professional workers while addressing the rapid technological developments in the industry and the changing needs of the labor market. The program has been developed jointly by JDC-TEVET and the Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs and Social Services (hereinafter: MOLSA). A pilot STARTER program was conducted as of 2016 and since 2019, the program has been in the assimilation phase at MOLSA. The Myers-JDC-Brookdale Institute conducted an evaluation and impact assessment study of the program from 2017 to 2019.

The evaluation study included two stages. In the first stage, the implementation of the program's operating model and the outcomes of the program were examined. In the second stage, the incremental impact of the program was examined in comparison with the day training courses conducted by the Division for Vocational Training at MOLSA. This report is the final research report of the program evaluation.

## Goal

The overarching goal of this study was to assist in developing the program and to assess whether it achieved its objectives and had an impact on the employment of its participants.

## Method

The study was based on the following: the analysis of data provided by the program's administrative information system regarding all 389 trainees in the twenty training courses examined; two surveys conducted among 204 trainees and two surveys conducted among 32 employers – at the end of the training and a year later; fifty in-depth interviews with program personnel, with employers, and with other stakeholders; and three focus groups with trainees from three different training courses. The program impact assessment was also based on an additional survey conducted jointly with MOLSA among 187 graduates of the traditional vocational training courses (day training courses) operated by the Ministry's Division for Vocational Training.

## Findings

Employers take part in the development of training courses and curricula and are encouraged to assume responsibility for the apprenticeship process at the workplace. This contributes significantly to the identification of the labor market needs, the introduction of up-to-date industry knowledge, and the adaptation of the training institutes' curricula to employers' needs. At the same time, it was found that coordinating the activity of the various bodies involved in running the program is a challenging task. Such coordination is required to ensure the ongoing and efficient implementation of the program and the relevance of the courses to labor market needs. It was also found that the equipment available in some of the workshops was not up to date and that likewise, some parts of the curricula were outdated. It further emerged that notwithstanding the close cooperation with the employers, more stringent supervision is required in the workplace to ensure an effective and successful apprenticeship.

While the implementation of the pilot program involved quite a few challenges, the findings of the outcome assessment show that in accordance with the program objectives, 68% of the trainees graduated with a vocational diploma and that a year following graduation, 90% of the trainees were working, half of them in the trade they learned. The graduates' average wage was higher than the minimum wage at the time of assessment. The majority of graduates and employers reported that the material learned in the training course was relevant to work in the trade. However, about one-fifth of the trainees dropped out, mainly due to economic difficulties during their studies, lack of interest in the trade learned, or failure to persist in a training institute.

The study findings regarding program implementation and outcomes were presented to the commissioning organization, JDC-TEVET, in June 2019. Since then, many of the recommendations and suggested directions for action were adopted by the bodies managing and implementing the program, and it seems that they successfully coped with many of the challenges – inter alia, enhancing the curricula development and updating the syllabuses in collaboration with the employers; updating the equipment in some of the workshops; and, given the great importance of apprenticeship at the workplace, tightening and strengthening supervision over the apprenticeship.

In the final stage of the study, the incremental impact of the program on the rates of employment in the trade learned and on the wages earned by program graduates a year following graduation was evaluated in comparison with the corresponding employment rates and wages of the graduates of traditional vocational training courses. The differences between the sample of STARTER graduates (the treatment group) and the sample of traditional vocational training graduates (the comparison group) in some of the characteristics relevant to the expected outcomes were addressed using matching methodologies. It was found that the incremental impact of the

program on its graduates' wages compared with the traditional training sample was an increase of 1,029 NIS per month (an increase of 16%,  $p < 0.01$ ). The incremental impact of the program on employment in the learned trade was 8.8 percentage points (but it was not statistically significant). An international comparison indicated a high impact of the program on graduates' wages compared with similar programs around the world. A focused comparison with analogous programs examined about a year following graduation ranks the STARTER program in the fourth place out of 13 similar programs.

## **Conclusion**

The model offered by the STARTER program was designed to provide solutions to at least some of the significant challenges faced by the traditional vocational training system in Israel and, in particular, to the widespread mismatch between learned skills and employers' needs. The study findings show that the incremental contribution of the STARTER program to its graduates' wages is substantial, even in comparison with similar programs around the world. Thus, vocational training through apprenticeship has the potential to make a significant contribution to human capital and earning capacity in Israel. Accordingly, serious consideration should be given to expanding the STARTER program, while addressing several complex implementation challenges.