



European  
Commission

# European Alliance for Apprenticeships

## Why are apprenticeships back on the agenda?

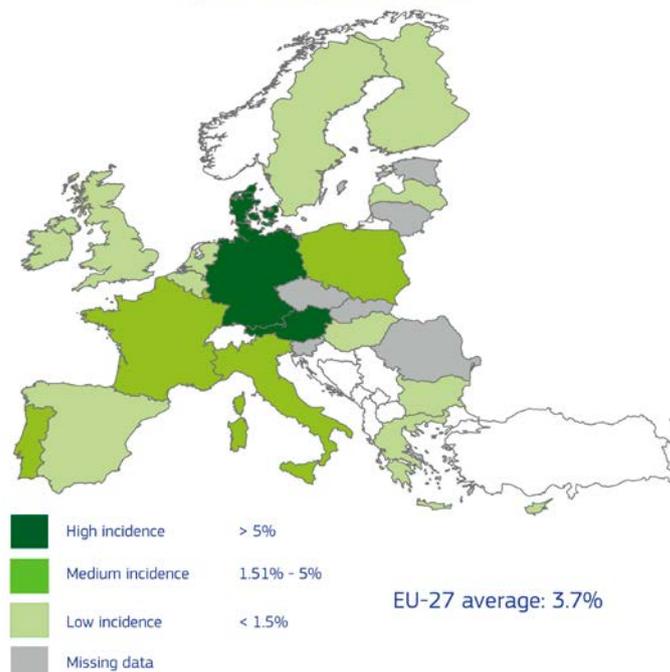
Apprenticeships combine vocational education and training (VET) in school and in a company and lead to a nationally recognised qualification. They have been shown to significantly improve young people's prospects for sustainable employment through the certifiable work experience and skills acquisition that they provide. Strong apprenticeship traditions in countries such as Austria, Denmark, Germany and the Netherlands have proven particularly successful in easing the school to work transition. However, the type of apprenticeship scheme on offer and the proportion of young people undertaking apprenticeships varies greatly across the EU. VET systems with a quality work-based learning component have proven particularly effective in delivering the right skills for employment. Close cooperation between schools and companies allows employers' requirements to directly influence the skills acquired by young apprentices.

Given the particularly harsh impact of the economic crisis on young people, with unprecedented rates of youth unemployment currently experienced in countries throughout the EU, attention is again being paid to the benefits of apprenticeships. While the long-term effects of apprenticeship reform include increased competitiveness and better matching of young people's skills to the labour market's needs, it can also help tackle high rates of youth employment in the shorter term. Estimations based on cross-country data show that a higher uptake of apprenticeships in the youth population is associated with a higher youth employment rate (ages 15 - 24) and lower youth unemployment. Consequently, boosting the quality and supply of apprenticeships is part of the EU's approach to tackling youth unemployment, including through the implementation of Youth Guarantee schemes.

## The European Alliance for Apprenticeships

The European Alliance for Apprenticeships (EAFA) was launched on 2 July 2013 in the context of the WorldSkills competition in Leipzig, Germany. It aims to increase the quality, supply and attractiveness of apprenticeships across Europe and to change mind-sets towards

Incidence (%) of Apprentices in the Youth Population (aged 15-29) in EU-27 (2011)



Source: Apprenticeship and Traineeship Schemes in EU-27: Key Success Factors  
[http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/vocational-policy/doc/alliance/apprentice-trainee-success-factors\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/vocational-policy/doc/alliance/apprentice-trainee-success-factors_en.pdf)  
NB: Data for CZ, EE, LT, MT, RO, SI and SK is missing; data for BG, CY, HU, IE and LV is only weakly reliable

this type of learning. The Alliance is a platform that brings together key stakeholders from the employment and education sectors in order to coordinate and upscale different initiatives for successful apprenticeship-type schemes. Important political milestones were the joint declaration by European Social Partners, the Lithuanian Presidency of the Council of the EU and the European Commission at the launch event, and a Council Declaration on the European Alliance for Apprenticeships adopted at the EPSCO on 15 October 2013.

## Targeted knowledge transfer and support for reform of apprenticeship systems

Under this strand of the Alliance, the Commission facilitates knowledge transfer through various measures: An early step in June 2013 was the publication of policy guidance on work-based learning in Europe in initial VET. Ongoing, the Commission provides support

on specific thematic aspects, via a targeted consultancy service that also includes European-wide or country-specific workshops, such as a learning seminar on evaluation methods for apprenticeship programmes on 4-5 February 2014. Under the Lifelong learning programme (LLP), 29 National Agencies are cooperating on the analysis of project results and products to build an online toolbox for use by stakeholders who are developing work-based learning, including apprenticeships. Additionally, a peer review among Directorate Generals for education and training facilitated mutual learning between Member States in November 2013, and a new Working Group on VET started in March 2014. The Alliance is also nurturing the renewed debate on quality apprenticeships in international fora: For example, the Commission and 6 EU Member States participated in a sub-regional workshop on apprenticeships, organised by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) in December 2013.

### Promoting the benefits of apprenticeships

Companies that engage apprentices are likely to benefit from a net profit on their investment, either during the apprenticeship or soon after by employing a fully trained worker. At the same time, VET students and apprentices will be able to learn valuable workplace skills in a professional environment, ensuring a greater degree of future employability. In the long run, such schemes are likely to contribute to increased tax revenue, less welfare payments, and great levels of social inclusion for all.

The Commission has highlighted the added value that apprenticeship schemes can bring: A review of apprenticeship and traineeship schemes in the EU27 between 2007 and 2013 and their labour market outcomes, and a "Guidebook for policy makers" further contributed to this goal. Additionally, a literature review by the European Expert Network on Economics of Education (EENEE) on the return on investment of apprenticeships for enterprises is another useful resource when promoting apprenticeship schemes in the EU. In 2014, the Commission is engaging with the OECD on studies to gain more insights on work-based learning, including costs and benefits of apprenticeships.

### Pledges and ambassadors

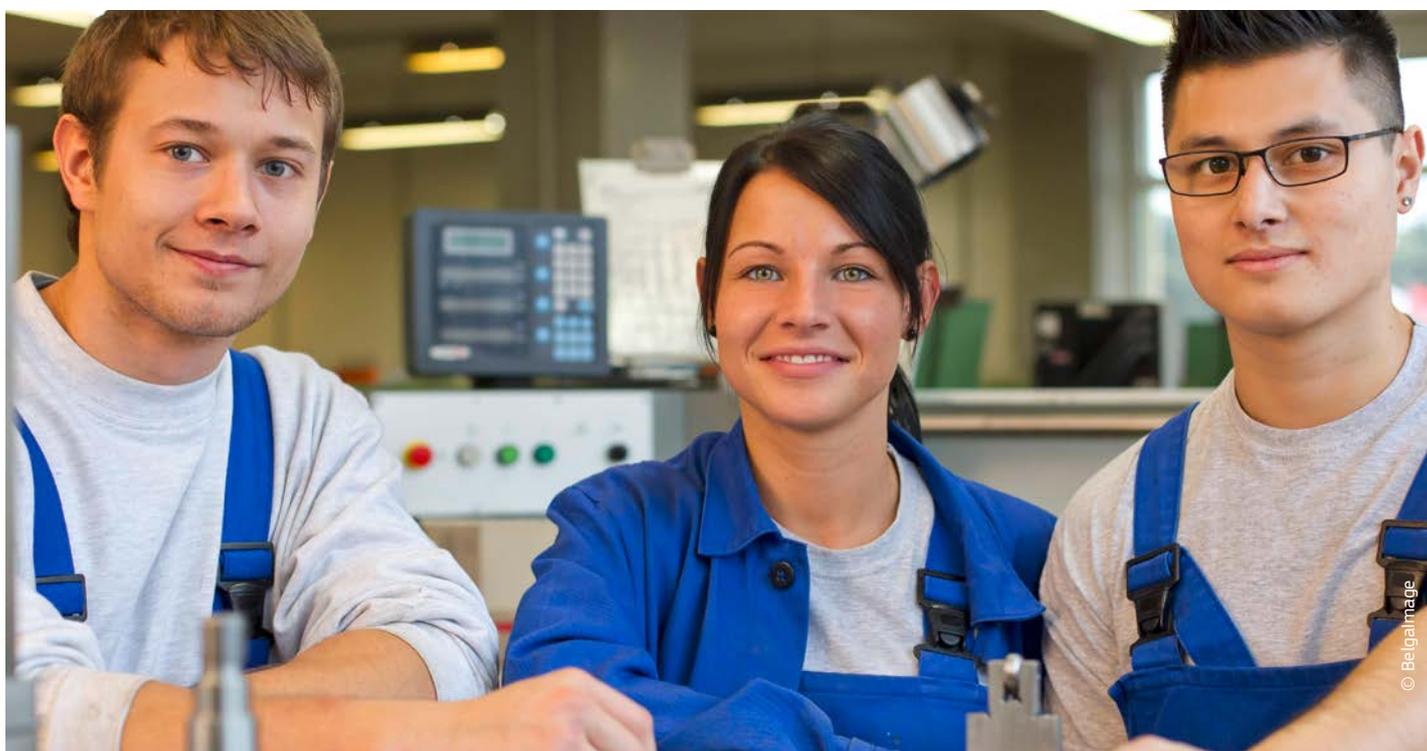
As of April 2014, 19 Member States have submitted concrete commitments on next steps to increase quantity, quality and supply of apprenticeships.

- By April 2014, some 30 organisations (social partners, chambers, businesses, VET providers, other organisations) have pledged to take concrete actions in support of the Alliance's objectives, including best practices exchange, awareness raising and steps to increase the quality and supply of apprenticeships.
- A pool of 'business ambassadors' and coaches for companies, notably SMEs, was set up on the initiative of the European Round Table of Industrialists (ERT). Currently 15 companies have signed up.

### A sample pledge: Microsoft and the European Youth Forum

"Microsoft and the European Youth Forum pledge to raise awareness around and help companies move forward in developing quality internships and apprenticeships, as based on the European Youth Forum's European Quality Charter on Internships and Apprenticeships.

Under the framework of the project 'Quality Internships and Apprenticeships', Microsoft and the European Youth Forum will aim to develop a learning network of companies on the topic of quality school-to-work transition. The objective of the project is to enable employers to identify strengths and weaknesses concerning the quality of their internship and apprenticeship schemes and to thus facilitate them in improving or setting up new quality schemes of educational value for young people. Microsoft will draw from the expertise of engaging youth through specific dual learning apprenticeship models with proven impact, e.g in Germany and the UK, and commit to reaching scale."



## The Youth Guarantee and apprenticeships

As a result of their wide-ranging benefits, apprenticeships are a fundamental element of the Youth Guarantee. In the April 2013 Council Recommendation, Member States committed to ensure that all young people up to age 25 receive a good-quality offer of employment, continued education, an apprenticeship or traineeship within four months of leaving formal education or becoming unemployed. Good-quality apprenticeship schemes, incorporating work-based learning and school education, are important to the success of a Youth Guarantee. Apprenticeship reform is one of the crucial components of planning to deliver the Youth Guarantee in the long-term, and this has been reflected in advice given by the Commission in both the planning stage and following Member States' submission of Youth Guarantee Implementation Plans.

In order to offer a high-quality apprenticeship, various elements come into play. The duration of an apprenticeship should allow significant skills acquisition and accumulation of experience. Additionally, an apprenticeship certified by a nationally-recognised qualification helps to cement its value. To really tailor apprenticeships to the needs of the labour market, partnerships with Social Partners in the design, implementation and governance of apprenticeships are crucial, together with other stakeholders, such as, where appropriate, intermediaries such as chambers of commerce, industry and crafts, professional and sectorial organisations. It is important to see apprenticeships as a preventive measure for youth unemployment in the mid to long term and to implement the necessary structural reform to allow this to happen. In light of this, it is essential that monitoring and evaluation mechanisms are established to ensure the continuing effectiveness and relevance of apprenticeship schemes.

## Funding for apprenticeship initiatives and reform

Significant EU funding is available to help in this area, but to ensure that a real impact is made, Member States should prioritise apprenticeship measures in their national budgets. The European Social Fund (ESF) can be used in support of apprenticeship reform and initiatives to boost apprenticeship supply and quality. A tailor-made consultancy service on policy

planning for apprenticeship and traineeship schemes has been set up, which can also serve to improve strategic use of the ESF. Additionally, funding under the Youth Employment Initiative can also be used to support apprenticeships, as direct support targeting young people not in employment, education or training. This EUR 6.4 billion\* funding stream supports regions experiencing youth unemployment (ages 15–24) rates of 25% or over. Erasmus+ provides funding for learning experiences abroad for VET students, apprentices and trainers. It also provides funding for strategic partnerships between education and training providers and companies, and for policy reform initiatives in order to strengthen apprenticeship schemes.

### A partnership approach to apprenticeship reform

Partnerships and cooperation on apprenticeship systems can be useful both within and between countries.

#### Partnerships within countries

Building partnerships in both the design and implementation of apprenticeship reform has much added value to bring as it links representatives from the labour market and education systems to foster transitions between the two. The EAfA promotes national partnerships between all relevant stakeholders, including public authorities in education and employment, businesses, social partners, chambers, VET providers, employment offices, organisations for youth and students, and EU funds managing authorities.

#### Partnerships between countries

Member States are invited by the Commission to in-depth cooperation and transfer of knowledge on work-based learning and apprenticeship schemes through the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) in education and training. Given the range of apprenticeship schemes existing in the EU with varying degrees of impact on the school to work transition, much benefit is to be drawn from cross-border cooperation and learning. As an example, Germany is working with six other EU Member States (Greece, Italy, Latvia, Portugal, Slovakia and Spain) on VET reform. Other forms of bilateral cooperation at all governance levels exist and are encouraged. For instance, a number of bilateral agreements between chambers of commerce, industry and crafts have been established.

\* In current prices.

## Apprenticeships in practice

### SMEs in Leipzig step up for Spanish youth

In Leipzig, 33 small and medium-sized companies have come together to provide apprenticeship places for young Spaniards. The effort is coordinated by the local Chamber of Crafts and a local training provider.

Elektro-Borger is a small electrical company in Leipzig with 23 employees (of whom 3 are apprentices). The company has a long apprenticeship tradition, but has found it increasingly difficult to find highly committed and motivated young apprentices. The company is therefore trying out something new by offering two new apprenticeships to young Spaniards under the MobiPro-EU programme.

“We are doing this because we believe we will find talented young people. We hope we can provide an important learning experience for them, and we also believe they will be of high value to us as a company” explained Hans Jürgen Borger, an initiator of the project.

At a time when Spain is facing high levels of youth unemployment, such apprenticeship opportunities are highly welcomed. Elektro-Borger is one of 33 companies cooperating with the local Chamber of Crafts and a local training provider to offer a total of 30 new apprenticeship placements for young Spaniards.

## Future Commission action on apprenticeships

- The Commission will follow up apprenticeship-related country-specific recommendations through the yearly European Semester process, including through the analysis of the Youth Guarantee Implementation Plans and follow up the commitments under the European Alliance for Apprenticeships. Cedefop’s country reports on VET systems will highlight progress in this field.
- The tailor-made consultancy service on apprenticeship and traineeships is available until December 2014;

including training courses and promotional activities in different Member States.

- The Education and Training 2020 Working Group on VET, which is part of the Open Method of Coordination process, allows for policy dialogue between Member State representatives with a view to fostering exchanges and preparing policy guidance on specific policy challenges related to apprenticeships and work-based learning. It covers issues such as governance and regulatory frameworks, support for SMEs, in company trainers and quality.
- An open specific call for proposals targets national authorities in charge of apprenticeships that are part of the initial VET system. This should assist them with preparing and implementing the necessary reforms for establishing or reviewing their apprenticeships systems.
- A European Apprenticeship Conference will take place on 7 – 8 May 2014 Thessaloniki, organised by Cedefop. This will facilitate the matching of countries with learning needs with countries offering support.

## Useful links

European Alliance for Apprenticeships

<http://ec.europa.eu/apprenticeships-alliance>

EaFA hotline

[eaafa@ec.europa.eu](mailto:eaafa@ec.europa.eu)

Youth Employment

<http://ec.europa.eu/social/youthemployment>

EU cooperation on Vocational Education and Training

[http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/vet\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/vet_en.htm)

Tailor-made consultancy service on apprenticeships and traineeships

<http://ec.europa.eu/social/youthtraining>

LinkedIn group on apprenticeships in Europe

<http://bit.ly/esfnetwork>