



## **Towards a Shared Vision of Apprenticeships**

### **Joint statement of the European social partners**

30 May 2016

As part of the EU social dialogue programme of integrated projects 2014-2016 the European social partners have undertaken separate projects on the cost-effectiveness of apprenticeship schemes (employers) and a European quality framework for apprenticeships (trade unions). At the conclusion of these projects the European social partners highlight the following shared views on apprenticeships in the EU.

Member States, with the involvement of social partners, need to develop and adapt VET systems in view of enhancing their effectiveness and quality, improving the employability of workers by notably providing them with key competences and transversal skills.

Apprenticeships are first and foremost a means of training, primarily of the young, that involve a strong work-based component. Apprenticeships can help young people to enter and remain in the labour market, which is especially important in view of high youth unemployment rates in the majority of Member States.

**Quality apprenticeships** not only enhance a person's employability and employment prospects through the acquisition of skills and competencies that are needed on the labour market, they also support personal development and lead to a recognised qualification.

To underpin the provision of a quality apprenticeship a common understanding of the content of learning outcomes should be developed. This requires the involvement of the social partners, training providers and national authorities. This would help to enhance transparency on learning outcomes.

In order to support both the needs of the labour market as well as apprentices, apprenticeship systems need to be governed in a way that ensures enterprises' skills needs are sufficiently taken into account. This calls for an appropriate involvement of social partners, in line with national industrial relations systems and education and training practices, and partnerships with VET providers and public authorities.

Apprenticeship systems require a clear and appropriate regulatory framework at the national level and are dependent upon enterprises being able to create training vacancies (and job opportunities) to take on learners.

To this effect it is important that the European Commission further encourages and facilitates mutual learning and the exchange of practices and ideas between relevant actors to support Member States and national social partners in adapting the governance of apprenticeship systems.

The status of apprentices differs from country to country. This means that they can be an employee with a work contract; a student with a contract with the training provider or have a dual status as an employee and a student. The nature of the relationship is determined in the context of national industrial relations systems and education and training practices. For each apprenticeship, the contract should clearly spell out the rights and obligations of the employer and apprentice from a working conditions and training perspective, including, where appropriate, the way in which apprenticeships are covered by social protection.

Apprentices should receive pay or compensation, according to the level that is applicable in a given national context, in line with national or sectoral minimum requirements or collective agreements. It is also necessary to ensure an appropriate element of commitment of the apprentices, reflecting the benefits apprenticeships bring them in terms of future qualifications and employment opportunities.

The majority of an apprentice's training time should be spent in the workplace. This practical learning environment is to the benefit of the apprentice and the enterprise. At the same time, it is recognised that the more time apprentices spend in enterprises the higher the costs that enterprises incur. Therefore, it is important that the wage or compensation that apprentices receive is set at a rate that makes it **cost-effective for an enterprise**, enabling a return on the investment, which encourages and fosters the supply of apprenticeship places.

A cost-sharing approach between enterprises and public authorities can help to increase the provision of apprenticeships as well as ensure adequate conditions for apprentices. In well-functioning apprenticeship systems, enterprises recoup their investments over time in terms of a better skills fit and through the partial productive activation of learners during training.

It is essential that apprentices have a solid learning base of knowledge, skills and competences that are acquired in primary and secondary school education prior to starting an apprenticeship. Apprenticeships are one approach, within a broader VET system, which support the transition from education to employment, and other measures should be available to those unable to gain access to apprenticeships.

With the stronger involvement of social partners and VET providers, careers advice and counselling services need to better communicate the role that apprenticeships can play in fostering employability and career progression. Such support services are also required throughout the duration of an apprenticeship.

Teachers, trainers and mentors, in schools and enterprises need to be supported to be appropriately trained and able to update their skills and competences to train apprentices in accordance with the latest teaching methods and labour market needs.

Apprenticeships should cover a wide range of sectors and occupations. There is a particular need to broaden the attractiveness and supply of apprenticeships beyond the sectors that they are traditionally associated with. Apprenticeship training for a wider range of occupations would also help to increase the employability and employment opportunities for all young people. This would help to increase the attractiveness of apprenticeships, notably in those countries that are looking to develop or strengthen their system.

Furthermore, it is important to expand the practice of apprenticeships beyond secondary VET, including through introducing apprenticeships and the principles of dual-learning across different types and levels of education pathways, notably higher VET as well as university education.

To foster apprenticeships in SMEs, it is important that they receive sufficient external support and see a return on their investments.

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The **European social partners call for a wider debate, with the European institutions and the Member States. This debate should take place, among others, in the framework of the Advisory Committee on Vocational Training (ACVT)**, on the policy priorities for supporting the provision, effectiveness and quality of apprenticeships.

This debate should pave the way for a **tripartite opinion of employers, trade unions and Member States, preferably in the ACVT. Such an opinion would provide a clear basis to foster quality and effective apprenticeships** in Europe. This must feed into determining the next steps of the European Alliance for Apprenticeships, and would contribute to the associated priorities of the Riga Conclusions.

Moreover, using the common views expressed in this statement as a starting point, the European social partners, recalling their work programme commitment for 2015-17, will, in the context of the social dialogue committee, “explore the possibility of further joint activities, including with a view to achieving **higher levels of mobility of apprentices across Europe**”.

Finally, to help build the evidence base on the advantages of apprenticeship training the EU could develop a **benchmark to improve apprenticeships across Europe**. This should be discussed further between the European Commission, Member States and the social partners.

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