

ETUC Resolution Improving quality of Apprenticeship and Work-based learning

Adopted at the ETUC Executive Committee on 11-12 March 2014

Background

Work-based learning, which is generally associated with apprenticeships for young people and dual systems of vocational training, is part of the policies supporting the transition from school to the labour market. It is integrated into broader education and training policies linked to labour market issues.¹

The European Commission, together with the European Parliament and several Member States, has recently strongly emphasised the crucial role that apprenticeship schemes and dual systems can play in facilitating transition from education and training to labour market, and in tackling the youth unemployment and NEET (Not in Employment Education or Training) phenomena affecting young people in most of the EU countries.

Apprenticeship and dual systems were part of the strategies set in the Employment Package (Towards a job-rich recovery, 18.4.2012), as well as privileged tools to be implemented by Member States in the framework of the Youth Guarantee and of the Youth Employment Initiative.

At the basis of such initiatives there is the Commission's conviction that education and training in general, and work-based learning in particular, together with labour market reforms, can be successful in tackling unemployment in Europe.

We, as the ETUC are not in line with such an analysis, because we are strongly convinced that only investment and different macroeconomic policies, other than austerity, can boost recovery and create jobs. Furthermore, in order to avoid jobless growth, the creation of good and fair jobs and a strong social dimension should provide the basis of the European economic governance.

The ETUC recognises that sound and work-oriented education and training policies and tools are essential to support and enhance broader macroeconomic actions to tackle recession and unemployment, particularly for young people. But at the same time the ETUC also underlines that education and training, as well as research, should be considered in the larger perspective of being essential supports to citizenship and human development, and not only as tools serving economy and labour market.

¹ *Work-based learning is often confused with workplace learning which actually means continuous training and to some extent lifelong learning for people already in work. Workplace learning is defined as activities to promote learning and training and personal development for workers in the workplace. It contributes to ensuring that workers remain in or re-enter the labour market, and that they are properly up skilled and prepared to face restructuring processes and economic changes.*

In this sense work-based learning and workplace learning are the most important pillars of the European trade union strategy to ensure that education and training policies serve labour market and workers' needs

<http://www.etuc.org/sites/www.etuc.org/files/EN->

[ETUC resolution Supporting Workplace Learning to tackle unemployment in Europe-2_2.pdf](#)

On the basis of its own analysis, the ETUC actively participated in the launch of the European Alliance for Apprenticeships, signed in Leipzig on 2 July 2013 by the European Commission, the European social partners and other stakeholders.

The ETUC together with its national and sectorial affiliates, as well as the other social partners, are now involved in implementing the Alliance and are strongly committed to putting in place actions to achieve this goal.

Apprenticeships schemes, when properly implemented, can significantly contribute to facilitating transition processes, to tackling skills mismatches in the labour market and to encouraging employers to provide young people with fair and good jobs.

However, we have also to recognise that in the current economic situation, with most of the countries still facing recession or stagnation and few of them experiencing very slight recovery, not all employers are able to create new job opportunities or are ready to employ apprenticeships properly and fairly.

Furthermore, common understanding is needed in Europe about what proper apprenticeships should be, and about which kind of reforms are needed to ensure the right definition and implementation of apprenticeship schemes, as well as full protection for apprentices.

In such a context, the ETUC developed in 2012/2013 a 1-year European project entitled "Towards a European quality framework for apprenticeship and work-based learning: best practices and trade unions contribution", which was funded by the European Commission. The project investigated apprenticeships and work-based learning, as well as the role played by trade unions in designing and delivering these schemes, in the following countries: the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Ireland, Italy, Spain, Germany, Cyprus, Bulgaria, Denmark and Estonia.

The final project report includes a comparative study, and a list of recommendations, which constitute the basis for this Resolution. The proposed draft Resolution therefore takes into account the results of the discussion in the final conference of the project (15-16 October 2013), as well as contributions from the ETUC Lifelong Learning Working Group.

The ETUC Recommendations for Apprenticeships

The ETUC, together with its affiliates, is committed to

- a) Analyse the obstacles to the proper and full implementation of apprenticeships and dual system schemes in as many EU countries as possible.
- b) Put in place trade unions' and social partners' actions to address these obstacles and to support the social partners' role in the implementation of the European Alliance for Apprenticeships and in the negotiation and enforcement of national reforms
- c) Ensure quality in apprenticeships and dual systems, by linking them to the existing education and training quality assurance tools at the EU and national levels, with the aim of setting up a possible European quality framework for apprenticeships
- d) Ensure appropriate working conditions and protection for apprentices and young people involved in work-based learning.

In line with such general commitments, the ETUC sets the following list of recommendations, to be addressed to trade unions first, but also to other social partners and also the European and national institutions that are involved in developing and implementing apprenticeships and dual systems:

- e) Apprenticeship schemes should be clearly defined on the basis of the proposal made by CEDEFOP, the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training, the specialist agency set up by the European Union: ‘...systematic, long-term training alternating periods at the workplace and in an educational institution or training institutions. The apprentice is contractually linked to the employer and receives remuneration (wage or allowance). The employer assumes responsibility for providing the trainee with training leading to a specific occupation’.
- f) Apprenticeship schemes should be built on stable foundations, on the basis of national law, regulations and/or collective bargaining agreements.
- g) Apprenticeship schemes should cater for the real employment and skills needs of employers within the framework of sectorial and/or national priorities and at the same time the personal development and career opportunities of apprentices.
- h) Apprenticeship schemes should require employers to enter into formal employment contracts with apprentices describing the rights and obligations of both parties, while respecting general national law or regulation.
- i) Apprenticeship schemes should require training institutions to enter into training contracts with apprentices describing the rights and obligations of both parties, while respecting general national law or regulation.
- j) Apprenticeship schemes should ensure that apprentices are paid by the employer, according to collective agreements, or a national and/or sectorial minimum legal wage, for the period of training.
- k) Apprenticeship schemes should be governed at all levels by a partnership between the social partners (trade unions and employers’ organisations), together with public authorities and training institutions.
- l) Apprenticeship schemes should guarantee good quality and safe working environments, and the public authorities together with social partners (trade unions and employers’ organisations) should be given responsibility for monitoring the suitability of workplaces and for accrediting interested companies. Before joining an apprenticeship scheme all apprentices should be provided training on health and safety at work.
- m) Apprenticeship schemes should provide appropriate guidance for apprentices, before, during, and after the training process.
- n) Apprenticeship schemes should provide opportunities for apprentices to enter higher education (e.g. universities).
- o) Apprenticeship schemes should provide opportunities for apprentices to participate in quality assurance procedures.

- p) Apprenticeship schemes should cover a wide range of different occupations and thus provide employment opportunities for all, men and women alike.
- q) Apprenticeship schemes should be built on a solid base of knowledge, skills and competences acquired in the primary and secondary school system.
- r) Apprenticeship schemes should include a strong training component, with a clear majority of learning provided in the workplace and a clear commitment to forward-looking developments within the labour market and society.
- s) Apprenticeship schemes should provide good quality training in the workplace, with in-company mentors trained for this purpose, and also within training institutions employing trainers that have up-to-date and appropriate skills.
- t) Apprenticeship schemes should be properly funded, with equitable cost sharing between employers and public authorities at regional and/or national and European levels.
- u) Apprenticeship schemes should be competence-based and have a duration which enables apprentices to attain the appropriate standards to work competently and safely.
- v) Apprentices should be accompanied by trade union representatives in the company to ensure that their rights are respected
- w) Apprenticeship schemes should be certified by competent tri-partite bodies to ensure that the knowledge, skills and competences acquired are recognised within the labour market and throughout the education and training system.
- x) Apprenticeship schemes should offer qualifications which are clearly placed within National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs), thus ensuring progression pathways to other NQF levels and programmes.
- y) Apprenticeship schemes should ensure the recognition of knowledge, skills and competences acquired by means of non-formal and informal learning.
- z) Apprenticeship schemes should include provision for the mobility of apprentices at the transnational level within the European Union.

Trade unions throughout Europe should continue to demonstrate their active and committed support for good quality apprenticeship schemes.

Trade unions throughout Europe should improve their engagement with apprentices in the workplace so as to represent their interests more effectively.