

**INFORMATION NOTE | JUNE 2015**

# Work-based learning: apprenticeships

Cedefop support to the  
European alliance for apprenticeships

## Benefits of work-based learning: apprenticeships

- (a) Combine study and work, allowing individuals to acquire work experience while improving their skills in close alignment with employers' requirements.
- (b) Help reduce skills mismatch by being responsive to labour market change.
- (c) Offer a stepping stone into the labour market; apprentices receive a recognised qualification for an occupation, valid across workplaces and certifying possession of a full set of knowledge, skills and competences to perform that occupation.
- (d) May result in a job offer from the company where the training was completed.

## Cedefop activities on apprenticeships and work-based learning

Cedefop supports the European alliance for apprenticeships (EAfA) through a range of complementary activities aimed at assessing the potential of apprenticeship and work-based learning (WBL) in different contexts.

It supports Member States, social partners and other vocational education and training (VET) stakeholders in developing quality apprenticeships.

Cedefop activities include:

- (a) providing strategic and expert input to the ET 2020 thematic working group on VET, which focuses on apprenticeship and WBL;
- (b) monitoring and analysing developments in apprenticeship and WBL reforms in Member States, particularly in relation to the deliverables agreed for VET in the Bruges communiqué;
- (c) organising events where policy-makers and social partners from different countries meet to develop partnerships in apprenticeship;
- (d) supporting interested Member States in setting up or reforming their apprenticeships through in-depth apprenticeship reviews.





## Countries under review: initial findings

Lithuania



Lithuania has been dealing with high youth unemployment; at policy level, apprenticeship is understood mostly as a key means of increasing youth employment.

Employers, however, face serious skill mismatches and lack of a qualified workforce to stay competitive. Apprenticeship can be an effective means of supporting lifelong learning.

The policy framework is supportive of apprenticeship but there is still a way to go to reach a common understanding on apprenticeship and much to be done.

Apprenticeship as one way of organising VET was established by the Law on VET in 2008, alongside school-based VET where the work-based element has been a tradition (in all formal VET programmes, students in their last year should have a period of practical training – *baigiamoji praktyka* – in companies). VET centres traditionally cooperate well with local enterprises to ensure work placements for their students; however, these placements are school-led and do not include employment contracts with students.

While interest in vocational training is increasing, some obstacles prevent apprenticeship from taking off. Lack of formal distribution of roles and responsibilities among key actors is one of the main barriers; as a result, VET centres and employers may encounter difficulties in organising apprenticeships. Key actors could benefit from more guidance from the Ministry of Education and Science (responsible for formal VET and with overall responsibility for apprenticeships), the Ministry of Social Security and Labour (responsible for training the unemployed and implementation of the youth guarantee) and the Ministry of Economy (responsible for training in enterprises). A greater degree of regulation of key aspects, while ensuring a certain autonomy for schools and employers to decide on tailored schemes, could also help.

Involvement of all players is a necessary condition for apprenticeship to exploit its full potential in helping tackle youth unemployment, attract more learners of all ages to vocational training, and improve skills for employability in Lithuania.

## Focus on Latvia

Aiming at better linking vocational education and the labour market, the Ministry of Education and Science (MoES) has designed a new apprenticeship-type scheme (1), which was initially piloted in six vocational schools in September 2013.

A series of amendments to the vocational education law, adopted by the government in August 2014 and to be approved by the Parliament, are essential to successful implementation of the new scheme. These amendments include linking vocational education and training qualification levels to national and European qualification levels, specifying entrepreneurs' participation in vocational school management, and specifying the role and function of sectoral expert councils in developing curricula and examination content, and in organising apprenticeships.

However, several challenges persist. While apprenticeships are implemented via a tripartite agreement (contract) between the student, the company and education provider, a proper legislative framework regulating the relationships between the apprentices and companies (on pay, training requirements and content) is still missing. Further, attracting employers to offer apprenticeships is challenging. While companies participating in the pilot phase were often large and already cooperating with vocational schools, further efforts will have to focus on attracting employers – especially in small and medium-sized enterprises – to offer apprenticeships. Effective incentives for companies to provide apprenticeships or other practical training placements are still missing; however, national authorities are discussing the possibility to apply labour tax incentives and other alternative





Apprenticeship in Malta is forging a new way forward. Malta is reforming its apprenticeship system<sup>(1)</sup> to increase quality; this will attract higher numbers of companies and learners, and improve responsiveness to needs of the labour market.

There is a sound basis, and great potential, for expanding and validating the system. Apprenticeships are viewed positively by social partners, learners, companies, and education and training institutions alike. Many learners find the idea of practical training in a company very attractive. There is a good pool of companies that understand their social responsibilities and assume them in relation to training apprentices. Companies that train report positive experiences; apprentices are usually taken into employment.

There is commitment from all parties to revise apprenticeship and improve its quality. One of the first steps is to set governance structures to ensure cooperation and equal partnerships between VET systems and employment/labour market systems. This includes cooperation between the learning venues (companies and colleges) and involvement of social partners at all levels. While recent reforms help improve communication and cooperation between the two learning venues, with education taking the lead, they do not address system-level relationships or the role of the social partners.

Well-functioning governance structures are also important as they enable quick reaction to changes in the employment and professional world. They also help tackle the current mismatch between what

apprenticeship offers and labour market needs.

Another step would be to clarify the place of apprenticeship in the overall education and training system. Currently, school-based and apprenticeship exist in parallel in the same vocational field and so there is competition between the school and apprenticeship trainings (two certificates, longer duration of apprenticeship than the school-based, leading to the same qualification). In this context, reform may also take into account restricting school and apprenticeship to vocational fields clearly demarcated from each other.

Raising employer awareness of apprenticeship benefits, in the medium term, is necessary for sustainability. This is particularly relevant for micro and small companies. Most companies in Malta are small or micro businesses and survive in a very competitive environment, including competition for a skilled workforce. Poaching and free-riding are very common. In this context, employers are willing to invest in apprentices as long as the apprentices stay in employment with them after graduation. Employers value apprenticeship from an enterprise, not from a national or sector, perspective. A balance between long-term interest in developing a skilled workforce and short-term interest of employers needs to be achieved. Businesses (employers' organisations) in dialogue with sector organisations, education institutions and social partners, could drive this process.

(1) The current system has been in place since the early 1990s.

reliefs for those enterprises/employers offering apprenticeships and practice placements for VET students. Other options discussed include creation of a vocational education scholarship or use of EU financial support instruments.

The action programme 'growth and employment' for 2014-20 and the education development guidelines for 2014-20 foresee special incentives for compensating expenditures both for students (such as insurance, transportation, dormitory) and employers (for provision of apprenticeships and practical training).

One key focus of the new apprenticeship is learning from other countries' experiences. A memorandum of cooperation in VET in Europe, and a declaration of intent on cooperation in WBL, were signed with Germany. Cooperation is also envisaged with the other Baltic States under the Erasmus+ project 'national authorities

for apprenticeships: implementing WBL in Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia (2014-15)'.

Initial signs are positive. Following publication of results of the pilots, in the academic year 2014/15 numbers of schools and employers applying to participate in new apprenticeships increased.

(1) In English, the more general term 'work-based learning' (*darba vidē balstītas mācības*) tends to be used when referring to the new apprenticeship-type scheme.

*The information presented here comes from a study on governance and financing of apprenticeship in five selected countries (Spain, Italy, Latvia, Portugal and Sweden), and ReferNet articles on apprenticeship-type schemes and structured WBL programmes.*

## Apprenticeship reviews

In line with EU policies, Cedefop supports cooperation at European level among Member States (MS) and interacts with individual countries that wish to develop quality apprenticeships, including in the context of the European alliance for apprenticeships. In 2014, Cedefop started cooperating with the MS to undertake in-depth reviews of their national developments on apprenticeship (thematic country reviews on apprenticeship). Between May 2014 and May 2015, Cedefop will have piloted two thematic country reviews on apprenticeship in two volunteer countries, Malta and Lithuania.

Three countries (Greece, Italy, and Slovenia) have expressed interest in participating in Cedefop's thematic country reviews on apprenticeships in 2015-16.

The main objectives of the country reviews are:

- (a) at national level, through close cooperation of Cedefop with national stakeholders, to carry out in-depth review of apprenticeship in selected countries to identify their specific strengths and challenges and propose a set of policy recommendations for ensuring quality apprenticeships;
- (b) at European level, to increase the evidence base supporting policy- and decision-makers in European countries, at different levels, in designing and implementing policies and measures for developing and/or improving quality apprenticeships; also to support comparison across countries.

With findings from each country participating in the project, the thematic country reviews will gradually expand the knowledge on apprenticeship across Europe. They will add a high level of detail, including factors determining or hampering the success of apprenticeship initiatives in different national contexts.

The review methodology relies on:

- (a) a common analytical framework;
- (b) an inclusive, participatory and collaborative approach and policy learning;
- (c) an evolving and iterative approach.

A broad range of stakeholders in the country (such as responsible ministries, social partners, and VET providers) are involved at different stages of the review.

If you wish to engage in apprenticeship review with Cedefop, please contact our apprenticeship team at:

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Keep up to date with our activities on apprenticeship at:

<http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/projects/empowering-young-people/apprenticeship>



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