

**INFORMATION NOTE | OCTOBER 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 line 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.

Support by Cedefop

Cedefop provides strategic and expert support to Member States, social partners and other VET stakeholders in developing quality work-based learning (WBL), particularly apprenticeships.

This support is mainly channelled by:

- (a) providing strategic and expert input to the ET 2020 thematic working group on VET (focus on apprenticeships and other forms of work-based learning until 2015) working closely with DG Employment;
- (b) monitoring and analysing developments in work-based learning, including apprenticeship reform in Member States, particularly for the deliverables agreed for VET in the Bruges communiqué and in relation to the commitments Member States have made under the alliance;
- (c) organising with the European Commission a conference on supporting SMEs to engage with apprenticeships (9 and 10 November 2015);
- (d) cooperating with the European Commission and other international organisations on the inter-agency working group on work-based learning and cooperation with the OECD on costs and benefits of apprenticeships;
- (e) supporting interested Member States in setting up or reforming their apprenticeships through in-depth apprenticeship reviews (thematic country reviews on apprenticeships).



A new start to apprenticeships

ITALY



Apprenticeship is a high priority in the Italian political agenda and has been for the past twenty years. Two major reforms have changed the legal framework since 2011, and a number of additional normative provisions were introduced to simplify rules and bureaucracy, and to support companies to start apprenticeships, mainly with economic incentives. According to the latest reform (2015), apprenticeship is defined and used as ‘a permanent employment contract for youth training and employment’. The Italian system consists of three main types of apprenticeship. The first and the third lead to an education qualification, at upper secondary, post-secondary and tertiary levels. In this connection, ‘they integrate, in a dual system, training and work’ (Article 41, paragraph 3, legislative Decree No 81/2015). The second type of apprenticeship is a vocationally oriented scheme for young adults aged 18 to 29, with a marginal component of formal training paid with public resources: a maximum 120 hours in three years, to be carried out inside or outside the company. Upon completion, apprentices can become skilled workers by acquiring contractual qualifications, as defined and recognised by collective labour agreements (no education qualification is awarded).

Despite the efforts at normative level, there is an increasing distance between laws, policies and practice, mainly in terms of legal provision enactment. Apprenticeships stocks have been recording a constant declining trend in recent years, despite their potential benefits to cope with youth unemployment, the NEET phenomenon and investment in human capital for growth. Apprenticeships linked to school and university curricula are still an exception, while type 2 apprenticeship covers 91% of all contracts. As a consequence, apprenticeships are mainly used to hire young adults rather than youth, especially in recent years: between 2009 and 2014, 15 to 19 year-old apprentices have decreased compared to 25 to 29 year-olds, which traditionally represent the largest component of the apprentice population, together with those 20 to 24 years old.

The main challenge for apprenticeships in Italy remains the education and training function and its quality. In 2013, only one third of all type 2 apprentices were enrolled in formal training activities provided by the regions.

The latest reform tries to expand and strengthen apprenticeship integration within the school system, so mainly concerns types 1 and 3. The reform broadens the spectrum of education qualifications, makes curricula more flexible in terms of duration, and tries to balance salaries with education duties.

In June 2015, Cedefop started a thematic country review on apprenticeships in Italy, in collaboration with the Ministry of Employment and a group of stakeholders representing the Ministry of Education, ISFOL, employers’ associations, trade unions, the regions, and training providers. The review should focus on type 1 apprenticeship, with an action research approach: rather than conduct a theoretical study, Cedefop intends to work closely with practitioners, companies, apprentices and those who work on apprenticeship on a day-to-day basis. By understanding the system’s strengths and weaknesses, and the challenges at stake, Cedefop’s review will support Italy in the creation of a quality apprenticeship system leading to education qualifications for young people.

On the way to new apprenticeships

SLOVENIA



In June 2015, Slovenia agreed to a thematic country review on apprenticeship that Cedefop will conduct in cooperation with the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, involving a broad range of stakeholders in the country. The review is estimated to be finished in autumn 2016.

Youth unemployment (increased from 10.4% in 2008 to 20.2% in 2014) and increasing shortage of skilled labour are issues of growing concern. Apprenticeship can become a way to increase employment of young people and adults through closer links between training and the labour market/work and stronger involvement of employers and chambers in preparing their workforce.

In the mid-1990s, Slovenia had dual VET programmes alongside school-based programmes in initial VET. The system was discontinued with the introduction of a new law (2006). However, the mismatch between employers' needs and expectations and VET graduates' skills persists; there is a need for a sustainable system that would improve skill match and employment.

The current VET system is school-based with a work-based component that is a mandatory part of all VET programmes leading to recognised qualifications.

The work-based component of initial VET programmes has been strengthened in recent reforms, as it is considered an important connection between education and the world of work. It varies in different VET programmes and qualification levels. The required length of the practical training in companies in three-year VET programmes is 24 weeks but it can be extended to up to 53 weeks. In practice, this extension is rarely observed as it requires individual training agreements and needs more regulatory provisions and support to schools and companies. The company-based part of VET programmes does not involve an employment relationship between learners and companies: the process is entirely coordinated by schools. There are examples of good cooperation between schools and companies but there are no mechanisms regulating such cooperation and distribution of responsibilities.

Current debate on apprenticeship takes place at a high policy level and involves social partners: in the council of experts that coordinates the preparation of legislation and VET programmes; and in the working group representing ministries, VET providers and social partners who meet regularly to discuss issues relevant to VET development in Slovenia. The need for apprenticeship and internship is included in the social pact 2015-16 signed by representatives of the government, trade unions and employers; collective agreements in some sectors envisage the reintroduction of apprenticeships, especially where labour shortage is observed.

One of the directions considered is that apprenticeship can go beyond VET for young people and become part of higher vocational programmes, national vocational qualification certificates, programmes for adults, master craftsmen training provided by chambers, and training supported by the public employment service. The particular interest in expanding apprenticeship for training of adults is linked to an ageing population and decrease in the youth cohorts.

Cedefop's thematic review can be useful in helping define the place of apprenticeship in the VET system; clarify roles and responsibilities of all relevant stakeholders; and motivate and stimulate implementation. The overall expectation is that the review can help develop a good evidence base for policy decisions and suggest possible scenarios for developing apprenticeship in Slovenia.

Focus on Luxembourg



While apprenticeship programmes in Luxembourg are well established and are at the core of vocational programmes, labour market challenges, especially in terms of unemployment, skills mismatch and early leaving from education and training, called for strengthening education and training measures and making apprenticeship more effective and respondent to labour market needs.

Against this background, the 2008 VET reform strengthened partnership between State and social partners, introduced qualitative assessment of learning outcomes (evaluated through acquired skill) and a modular system allowing apprentices who fail a required module to continue their training and catch up at a later stage of their apprenticeship, without having to repeat the whole school year.

Apprenticeship programmes last three years, combining company-based and school-based learning. Learners can chose between a programme leading to the certificate of professional competence (certificat de capacité professionnelle, CCP), and a progamme leading to the professional competence diploma (diplôme d'aptitude professionnelle, DAP). Apprenticeship is not restricted to initial education. Any person over 18 having left school for more than one year and who wants to learn a trade or redirect his/her professional life can follow an 'adult apprenticeship' and attend CCP or DAP courses.

Apprenticeship programmes in Luxembourg are also characterised by focus on cooperation with, and mutual learning from, bordering countries. Given the small size of the country, certain diplomas are not offered in the Luxembourgish school system. Learners have the opportunity to follow a cross-border apprenticeship, meaning that they can do their practical training in a company based in Luxembourg, while attending school in one of the bordering countries.

In light of a renewed effort to tackle youth unemployment and promote investment in skills, policy-makers are currently discussing further reforms aimed at fine-tuning and improving the current VET framework and apprenticeship. These reforms should include: changes in apprenticeship provision and job placement agreement offering more training at the level of basic vocational programmes (CCP); the introduction of a final integrated project (aimed at checking whether the student has developed the complex competence needed to handle a real or simulated work situation) replacing final exams for CCP; and simplification of the criteria used to evaluate student progress in VET programmes.

While much effort has been channelled – and continues – to improve the apprenticeship system, some challenges persist. The system would benefit from better coordination between education and employment policy. Further, while there are several initiatives to raise VET attractiveness, more effort should be devoted to make apprenticeship programmes more attractive for learners and their parents. The approach to finding a company for an apprenticeship may be regarded as a structural limitation of the Luxembourgish apprenticeship, as learners themselves are responsible for finding a training place in an enterprise. While, the vocational guidance service of ADEM (public employment service) supports young people through counselling and a central register of all available apprenticeship places, if the learner fails to find an enterprise, he/she loses the right to continue schooling, hence limiting his/her chances for further learning.



Modernising and expanding apprenticeships

GREECE



High youth unemployment rates put apprenticeships under the spotlight of policy priorities and developments in Greece. The national plan for apprenticeships for 2014-20 aims at raising the number of apprentices from 6 000 to 30 000 per year; several voucher-type projects supporting apprenticeships or work placements outside the formal education system were subsequently introduced.

A recent Law on Secondary Education (2013) envisaged expansion of apprenticeships in most VET programmes. New three-year long alternance programmes (SEK) offered by the Ministry of Education were introduced in 2013-14 at upper secondary level, offering three-year programmes that would lead to qualifications at EQF level 3. The law envisaged a new year-long post-secondary apprenticeship programme ('apprenticeship year' outside the formal system at EQF level 5) as an option to graduates of the most popular school-based VET programmes (EPAL). Limited progression routes and low share of training in enterprises, reduced range of programmes offered, and inconsistency with other existing apprenticeship programmes (EPAS, offered by the public employment service) could be reasons why enrolment rates in SEK were rather low. There are also indications that employers conceived the post-secondary programme as a means for substituting labour.

After a change of political priorities in 2015, the Ministry of Education addresses these issues in the draft Law on Education (mid-2015), which:

- (a) discontinues the three-year upper secondary alternance programmes as offered by SEK schools and allows post-secondary VET providers (IEK) to offer similar programmes in several specialities;
- (b) includes the post-secondary year in the formal education system, as a specialisation year offered in the form of apprenticeship (on-the-job training) or practical training alongside specialisation courses;
- (c) increases the flexibility of apprenticeship and practical training provision at post-secondary level (IEK).

Ministries of education and labour also started working closely together on a comprehensive national framework for apprenticeships. Cedefop, through the thematic country review of apprenticeships in Greece, will contribute to setting up a coherent framework for apprenticeships at national level by supporting identification of its objectives and main features. The project will then lead to specific policy recommendations to be fed into the national framework.

This increased cooperation paves the way for harmonisation of the formal education system with the apprenticeship schemes ('professional schools', EPAS) offered by the Greek public employment service (OAED). For various sociocultural reasons linked to limited progression to higher education, this type of programme was traditionally less popular for students and parents compared with general education and mainstream school-based VET. Currently, EPAS OAED offer two-year programmes (EQF 4) in 51 schools, with a strong workplace learning element (four days per week). More recently, enrolment rates in EPAS apprenticeship programmes are estimated to vary between 7 to 9% of the total learners at upper secondary level (5 500 to 6 000 new students per year). Labour market transition rates are still significant (at least 70% of graduates get a job after completion of studies) given the high youth unemployment rates in the country. EPAS programmes have already been improved since 2010, including the establishment of career offices for graduates in the dual VET schools. OAED is currently (2015) implementing extensive modernisation of its apprenticeship programmes, where emphasis is put on clearly defining the learning outcomes expected to be achieved in the workplace for each specialities, raising transparency in evaluation procedures and increasing SMEs' participation through inputs such as incentives and campaigns.

Other types of workplace learning should also be taken into consideration in developing a national framework for apprenticeships. Post-secondary vocational training institutes (public or private IEK) provide six-month internships before certification examinations. Secondary and post-secondary schools supervised by ministries of tourism and agriculture offer programmes with strong workplace training elements that are not formally regarded as apprenticeships. Studies in technological higher education institutes include six-month internships.



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 those MS that volunteered to undertake in-depth reviews of their national developments on apprenticeship (thematic country reviews on apprenticeships). Between May 2014 and May 2015, Cedefop piloted two thematic country reviews on apprenticeships in two volunteer countries, Malta and Lithuania.

From mid-2015 to the end of 2016, the review will be completed in three other volunteer countries: Greece, Italy and Slovenia.

The main objectives of the country reviews are:

- (a) at national level, through cooperation between Cedefop and national stakeholders, to carry out in-depth review of apprenticeships to identify 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; possibly to support comparison across countries.

With findings from each country participating in the project, the thematic country reviews will gradually expand the knowledge on apprenticeships 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:
apprenticeship-team@cedefop.europa.eu

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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