



## The European Alliance for Apprenticeships

### **Key message**

The European Alliance for Apprenticeships (EAfA) has played a broadly positive role up to now. However, a more targeted approach could deliver more tangible results. In this respect, a key consideration after the first two years of the Alliance is to strengthen the link with relevant national efforts. Employers will get more involved in apprenticeship schemes when they are effective in meeting their skills needs. Therefore, putting in place the systems and structures that allow for the cost-effective engagement of employers and which give them greater ownership over apprenticeship schemes should be the focus in the coming years. Conversely, the signing of pledges to increase the number of apprenticeship places may be relevant for some companies that intend to develop their use of apprenticeships under existing systems, but it will not foster the development or strengthening of national apprenticeship systems, which is what is really needed to significantly increase employer engagement in apprenticeship schemes.

With such an approach the EAfA can help to trigger the national policies that are needed to fully utilise the potential of apprenticeships in all sectors.

### **The value of apprenticeships – making the business case**

Apprenticeships play an important role in helping to meet companies' skills needs, while helping people transition into, and progress within, the labour market. In particular, apprenticeships can bring a number of advantages for employers, including: the possibility to attract young talent and to ensure a better skills matching as a result of in-house training, increased production, new knowledge and perspectives, a wider and more diverse talent pool and recognition of the company as a good employer.

To countries that do not have well-established apprenticeship systems, or no system at all, exploring the costs involved in developing such systems and the trade off with the benefits that employers will get is essential. For some employers there can be the mind-set that the cost of training someone outweighs the benefits by being a burden on a company's financial and human resources. This view needs to be challenged. This requires the review and, where appropriate, adaptation of national apprenticeship systems to ensure that they positively contribute to European companies' competitiveness.

### **Partnerships**

If companies are to see apprenticeships as an investment there needs to be the provision for them to have greater ownership of schemes, including design of the curricula, and, where appropriate, greater control over funding. Moreover, cooperation or partnerships with vocational education and training (VET) providers and/or trade unions as part of the governance of apprenticeship systems can be of added value. Such partnerships need to reflect the diversity of the labour market situation and national industrial relations and education and training systems.

## **Putting in place appropriate framework conditions to foster supply**

Taking these elements into account, BUSINESSEUROPE believes that to foster the supply of apprenticeship opportunities it is important to ensure that appropriate framework conditions are in place at the national level. This particularly concerns governance and funding issues.

Another key aspect is to ensure that companies and employers' organisation have better access to education systems so that they can influence the content of curricula to ensure their labour market relevance. This will benefit companies in terms of meeting their skills needs and enhance apprentices' skills and competences and, therefore, their employability.

## **The European Alliance for Apprenticeships – results so far**

The European Alliance for Apprenticeships has helped to raise awareness about apprenticeships and fostered exchanges of views, ideas and best practices among the range of stakeholders that are engaged in successful apprenticeship systems. This has hitherto played an important role in shaping the reform of national apprenticeship systems in some countries, for example:

- England: The apprenticeship system is being reformed to make it simpler, to give employers real purchasing power, and to put employers in the driving seat. The new approach is being piloted by a number of "trailblazer" businesses and to date, over 1,000 employers in over 100 sectors have designed and published 120 new apprenticeship standards, helping to ensure quality apprenticeships that are relevant to business need. However, the number of higher apprenticeships (level 4 and above) remains around 2% of the total – and the challenge going forward is to deliver both quantity and quality.
- Ireland: The Irish government established an Apprenticeship Council to expand enterprise-led apprenticeship into new sectors of the economy. The response to the Council's call for proposals from consortia of industries, professional bodies and education and training providers has exceeded expectations.
- Latvia: Amendments to the Vocational Education Law were adopted in May 2015 introducing Work-Based Learning as a type of vocational education and training, and the Regulation is currently under the development. Discussion takes place on the financial instruments to motivate companies, especially SMEs, to engage in Work-Based learning system.
- Slovakia: Discussions are currently taking place about the introduction of the dual system of apprenticeship training which would involve students spending 50% of their training time in the company;
- Spain: The recent Organic Law on the Improvement of Quality Education introduces dual vocational training represents a good step to bring the worlds of education and business closer. The Royal Decree on a new training and learning contract going in the same direction of strengthening the dual VET in Spain. Although further efforts are needed to increase the labour market relevance of education and training;

In the coming years the Alliance needs to continue to build on this to help identify the principles that characterise well-functioning apprenticeship systems and which can be promoted as broader European principles for successful schemes, whilst recognising and respecting very different education and training systems in Member States. BUSINESSEUROPE is ready to further contribute to informing this process. In parallel it is important that the Alliance enhances opportunities for the dissemination of information and the exchange of best practices.

The European semester process, and particularly the country specific recommendations, also has an important role to play to underpin and reinforce this work so as to contribute to the development of national apprenticeship systems and foster the involvement of companies.

### **A more targeted approach**

The combination of theoretical and practical training that apprenticeships provide can help to make apprentices more 'work ready' than graduates from other types of education. Through working in a company during their training apprentices also have the advantage of having a foot in the door when they complete their training and are looking for employment.

Some young people may also prefer, and be better at, practical training rather than theoretical learning approaches and they should be supported in fulfilling their potential.

Nevertheless, there are a number of negative perceptions around apprenticeships that the Alliance can help to dispel and in doing so make a greater contribution to improving the attractiveness of apprenticeship training among young people and throughout society. These perceptions include:

- The persisting idea that apprenticeships (and VET in general) are a second class option to university education;
- The notion that apprenticeships are for the traditional blue collar sectors and occupations, and not the modern digital economy.

These ideas need to be challenged and can be addressed through the following actions:

- Having employers in the driver's seat when it comes to the design and delivery of apprenticeship schemes, which will help to ensure more apprenticeship placements;
- Exploring the role of apprenticeships in promising new sectors. For example, the provision of e-apprenticeships including, inter alia, to train people for digital and ICT-related occupations is testament to the new routes and opportunities that are being developed in response to present-day skills needs, while the more traditional ones continue to be just as important;
- Making career and qualification progression routes a key feature and encouraging higher education to promote the concept of higher (advanced) apprenticeships.

Therefore, the next phase of the Alliance could look to explore further opportunities for promotional activities linked to apprenticeships at EU and national levels.

- **EU:** an **EU apprenticeship week** could be envisaged with a series of events and visits at EU and national level to promote apprenticeship training and companies offering apprenticeships and to bring together the range of stakeholders that are needed for the successful delivery of apprenticeship schemes. For example, one aspect of this could be a campaign to improve the image of apprenticeships among young people, their parents, employers and wider society by promoting the benefits of this type of training.
- **National:** through partnerships between schools and colleges and employers' organisations more opportunities could be developed for potential apprentices to **visit companies with established apprenticeship schemes**. This would be an occasion for young people to see what being an apprentice actually means and to talk to existing apprentices about what they are learning and their future career path. It would also be important to bring apprentices and their supervisors into classrooms to talk to pupils and their teachers. There are a number of examples at national level, including in some countries with new or emerging apprenticeship schemes. These practices could be inspirational for other countries at EU level.

Such actions would help to foster a genuine practical outcome from the Alliance that would be of added value for companies and all stakeholders.

### **BUSINESSEUROPE's activities**

BUSINESSEUROPE is a founder member of the European Alliance for the Apprenticeships and, together with the other European social partners, European Commission and Lithuanian presidency, co-signed the declaration that launched the initiative in June 2013.

- *Project on the cost-effectiveness of apprenticeship schemes*

A BUSINESSEUROPE-led project on the attractiveness of apprenticeship schemes for employers is currently underway and is set to be concluded in 2016. Looking at the issue of cost-effectiveness and drawing on the diversity of national apprenticeship systems, the aim is to identify core elements to encourage employers to step up their role in apprenticeship schemes.

The project is focusing on the engineering, ICT and commerce sectors and with the engagement of national cross-industry and sectoral employers' organisations aims to foster cross-fertilisation and mutual learning. . The project, which is taking place together with the other European cross-industry employers' organisations (CEEP and UEAPME) and partners from the sectoral level, companies and VET providers is also a stepping stone for our future involvement as a European social partner in the promotion of apprenticeships across Europe.

- *Framework of Actions on youth employment*

The European social partners' Framework of Actions on youth employment is another vehicle channelling the contributions of BUSINESSEUROPE and our national member federations to the Alliance. This Framework of Actions was adopted in 2013 and is based on existing and new practices linked to four priority areas: **learning, transition, employment and entrepreneurship**. It outlines a variety of possible social partner actions as well as a series of recommendations to the EU institutions and Member States. It also identifies a number of national good practice examples with the aim of promoting the most effective initiatives identified across Europe that could be used as inspiration for designing solutions by national social partners in their respective contexts. This is currently being followed up with annual reports until 2017.

The development and strengthening of apprenticeship systems features strongly under the learning priority.

#### *Further information*

- The full text of the Framework of Actions can be viewed here  
<http://erc-online.eu/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/2013-00635-E.pdf>
- The country examples can be found here  
<http://erc-online.eu/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/2013-00636-E.pdf>
- The first follow-up report on the Framework of Actions can be viewed here  
<http://erc-online.eu/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/1st-follow-up-report-FoA-Youth-Sept-2014-Final.pdf>

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