



## A European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships

### KEY MESSAGES

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- 1 Apprenticeships can simultaneously help young people to enter and remain in the labour market and help companies to address their skills needs. Successful systems require a clear and appropriate regulatory framework at the national level.
- 2 Well-functioning apprenticeship schemes help meet enterprises' skills needs and appropriately take into account cost drivers with a view to encouraging enterprises to invest in apprenticeships. Consequently, there needs to be an openness at national level to better adapt systems to enterprises' needs and to better enshrine employer and, where appropriate, social partner involvement in the governance of apprenticeship systems.
- 3 The proposed council recommendation strikes a crucial balance that is based on a common understanding of quality and effectiveness, while respecting the diversity of national systems and practices.

### WHAT DOES BUSINESSEUROPE AIM FOR?

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- Quality and effective apprenticeships that simultaneously help to address enterprises skills needs and which provide a smooth transition into employment for learners.
- Apprenticeship schemes in which at least half of the training time is spent in an enterprise.

**POSITION PAPER**

**EUROPEAN FRAMEWORK FOR QUALITY AND EFFECTIVE  
APPRENTICESHIPS**

**Introduction**

1. On 5 October 2017 the European Commission has published a proposal for a Council Recommendation on Quality and Effective Apprenticeships;
2. In December 2016, the European social partners and member states adopted an Opinion in the framework of the Advisory Committee on Vocational Training (ACVT) on A Shared Vision for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships and Work-Based Learning;
3. The discussion on the ACVT Opinion was initiated by the European social partners following their separate project activities on apprenticeships. The employers' organisations (led by BusinessEurope) looked at the cost-effectiveness of apprenticeships and the European Trade union Confederation focused on the quality of apprenticeships;
4. The work of the European social partners and the ACVT Opinion has provided a substantial part of the input to the proposed council recommendation.

**General comments**

5. 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 the structurally high levels of youth unemployment that have been observed in some Member States;
6. To foster the productive capacity of apprentices during their training and to achieve a smooth transition into employment at the end of the training, at least half of the training time should be spent in the workplace. This practical learning environment is to the benefit of the apprentice and the enterprise. BusinessEurope welcomes that this has been recognised in the proposed recommendation;
7. At the same time, it needs to be recognised that the more time apprentices spend in enterprises the higher the costs that enterprises incur, especially during the first years and depending on the sector. 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, particularly SMEs, enabling a return on the investment, which encourages and fosters the supply of apprenticeship places;
8. Quality apprenticeships should be understood as not only enhancing a person's employability and employment prospects through the acquisition of skills and competencies that are needed on the labour market, but also through supporting personal development and leading to a recognised qualification;
9. Crucially, the approach taken in the proposal is one that is based on a common understanding of quality and effectiveness, while respecting the diversity of national systems and practices;

10. The proposal takes into account the importance of the demand-led approach to apprenticeships by emphasising the role of employers for the successful functioning of apprenticeship systems and schemes;
11. At the systemic level this concerns the need for a clear and consistent regulatory framework; the importance of involving social partners in governance structures; and the need for a wider partnership approach;
12. At the level of individual apprenticeship schemes the proposal recognises the role played by employers in determining the learning outcomes and the related importance of training time in an enterprise;
13. Therefore, overall, BusinessEurope welcomes the approach that is taken in the proposed recommendation.

### **Specific comments**

14. BusinessEurope has the following specific comments on the proposed recommendation:

#### On the proposed definition

15. It is noted that the draft recommendation defines apprenticeships as, *“formal vocational education and training schemes that combine substantial work-based learning in companies and other workplaces with learning based in education or training institutions that lead to nationally recognised qualifications. These are characterised by a contractual relationship between the apprentice, the employer and/or the vocational education and training institution, with the apprentice being paid or compensated for her/his work”*;
16. While such a definition can be useful for facilitating discussions and understanding at European level, where the EU is responsible for encouraging co-operation between member states and supporting and supplementing their actions, as necessary, it also needs to be recalled that each national system has its own specificities;
17. Such differences mean that not every national system will correspond to all the elements of this definition and this needs to be understood as a legitimate reflection of national competence and practice in this area;

#### On the proposal for learning and working conditions

18. The proposal that at least half of the apprenticeship should be carried out in a workplace is very welcome and would significantly enhance the learner’s future employability and benefit companies through the increased productive capacity of the apprentice. In cases where current systems do not foresee this yet, it is important to adapt framework conditions to progress towards an increased share of training time in the workplace as part of Member States’ and social partners’ actions to implement the recommendation at the national level;
19. The opportunity to spend part of the apprenticeship in another country could be an additional element of an apprenticeship that would benefit the learner and employer, depending on the circumstances, but should not be viewed as a requirement;

20. BusinessEurope welcomes the reference to apprentices receiving pay and/or compensation in line with national or sectoral requirements or collective agreements where they exist, and taking into account cost-sharing arrangements between employers, apprentices and public authorities;
21. A cost-sharing approach is a key component of encouraging more companies to get involved in offering apprenticeships. Therefore, BusinessEurope welcomes the reference to financial and non-financial support, especially for micro companies and SME, based on cost-sharing arrangements between employers, apprentices and public authorities, thus enabling cost-effective apprenticeships;
22. As concerns a written contract, it is questionable whether vocational training institutions need to be signatories, particularly in employment-led systems in which contracts are typically concluded between the employer and the apprentice;
23. It is important for employers to have a specific role in the governance of apprenticeship systems and in the definition of curricula, in cooperation with trade unions, as appropriate. Such processes typically occur in tandem with the relevant accreditation bodies on a national or regional level.
24. As concerns the definition of the learning outcomes, BusinessEurope welcomes the reference to the role of employers and highlights that it is employers that need to play the leading role in this respect. This is important for attracting enterprises to offer apprenticeships and to ensuring the labour market relevance of the training;
25. At the same time, to achieve quality and effective apprenticeships a wider understanding among social partners, training providers and national authorities of the importance of the learning outcomes-based approach in the design, delivery and assessment of the training is necessary. This is important for ensuring that apprenticeship schemes appropriately take into account labour market needs and would help to enhance the transparency of apprenticeship training.

#### On the proposed criteria for framework conditions

26. BusinessEurope supports the call for involving social partners in the design, governance and implementation of apprenticeship schemes, as per national industrial relations systems and education and training practices;
27. It also needs to be noted that the provision of apprenticeships is dependent upon enterprises being able to create training vacancies;
28. In line with the earlier comment on the mobility of apprentices, the transnational mobility of apprentices could be a component of apprenticeship qualifications, but should not be an obligation;
29. BusinessEurope particularly welcomes the proposed follow-up at EU level in the form of support services for knowledge sharing, networking and mutual learning. These should be initiated through the European Alliance for Apprenticeships, European Structural and Investment Funds and other EU funds, as appropriate.
30. This should play an important role in assisting member states and social partners to develop and/or strengthen national apprenticeship systems, as appropriate. This includes helping to achieve the better provision careers advice and counselling services to apprentices;

31. The new structural reform support service, which is intended to provide on-demand technical support for member states to undertake reforms may also help to facilitate the adaptation of national apprenticeship systems;
32. As part of the next steps, BusinessEurope expresses its support for the Commission's intention to introduce a system of bench-learning to assist apprenticeship reforms at national level. This approach, in which national systems would be peer reviewed by stakeholders from other member states, should lead to policy recommendations and be channelled through the European semester process;
33. Developing this approach in the build up to the fifth anniversary of the European Alliance for Apprenticeships in November 2018 would be concrete evidence of European added value in this area. Preparatory work for this process should take place in the ACVT.
34. Channelling national level follow-up through national reform programmes under the European semester process is also welcome and would help to ensure complementarity with the bench-learning approach.
35. As part of the national and European level follow-up it is also important to continue to promote the excellence and attractiveness of apprenticeships through awareness raising campaigns, including through the European Vocational Skills Week. Such campaigns would also benefit from enhanced cooperation with relevant organisations that already undertake such work, notably World Skills Europe.

## **Summary**

36. Overall, BusinessEurope welcomes the proposed recommendation, believing that there is a good balance for successfully achieving quality and effective apprenticeships while respecting the diversity of national systems and practices.

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