



COMMISSION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES

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COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION

**Promoting Apprenticeship Training in Europe**

# 1. Apprenticeship training launches working lives

## *Diversity and variety of apprenticeship schemes in Europe*

Apprenticeship schemes in Europe are many and varied, differing in terms of target groups, organisation, flexibility, level, actors involved, and recognition of qualifications. Levels of participation also vary widely, reflecting, among other things, differences in the status and importance of apprenticeship training within Member States' initial education and training systems. For example, in Germany, Denmark and Austria, apprenticeship training is of considerable importance, the number of participants being 3 to 6% compared to total workforce. This is about 20 times more than in countries like Belgium, Greece or Portugal with participation rates of 0,2 to 0,3%.

## *Common characteristics of apprenticeship*

Apprenticeship training is one form of initial vocational training which aims to provide young people with skills that can ease the transition into working life. As it combines theoretical education with practical work experience, it provides a valuable alternative to the more academic studies. Of course, a major benefit is that it leads to a recognised qualification.

## *Apprenticeship training - a key to improving employment prospects of young people*

At its meeting in Florence on June 21-22 1996, the European Council asked the Commission to undertake a study on "the role of apprenticeship in enhancing job creation." This request highlighted the commitment of the Heads of State and Government to fight, through education and training, youth unemployment, notably young people under the age of 25, which is currently close to 20%.

The study<sup>1</sup> shows that greater promotion of apprenticeship responds to this concern. It enhances job prospects to the extent that unemployment among young people who have successfully finished apprenticeship training tends to be below average.

This research presents a large number of successful school-to-work transitions. For instance, in the Irish apprenticeship system placement rates of 95 to even 100% are reported. In Austria, unemployed former apprentices have the lowest average duration of unemployment compared to other young unemployed. While the average period is about 60 days for former apprentices, this number rises to 80 to 100 days for those having completed other types of education. The importance of work experience within a company is also confirmed in the case of the new German Länder. Immediately after completion of training three-quarters of the apprentices who were trained within a company were employed, 19% unemployed. When the training took place outside a company, only 27% had a job and nearly 70% were unemployed. 15 months later 50%

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<sup>1</sup> The Role of Apprenticeship in Enhancing Employability and Job Creation: The significance of apprenticeship training for the labour market - Netherlands Economic Institute for the European Commission, April 1997.

had found employment and 23% were unemployed, whereas for the first group with in-company training the numbers were 71% versus 8%.

### ***The European contribution to reforms***

Improvements in apprenticeship training have often been made possible by financial support from the European Community in the framework of the European Social Fund. More than 20% of the Fund's 47 billion ECU for the period 1994 - 1999 is devoted to the young unemployed and their integration into the labour market. Key EC programmes are Youthstart and Leonardo da Vinci, in which pilot projects and transnational placements are helping to improve quality. The aim of such actions is to promote the exchange of best practices throughout Europe and disseminate innovative and high quality tools.

### ***The way forward***

This document is designed to highlight the characteristics of good quality apprenticeship training which help to make young people more employable. Drawn from a variety of initiatives in the Member States, the examples of best practice provided attempt to demonstrate how apprenticeship training can be more attractive and better adapted to changes in industrial patterns and activities.

Finally, the Commission proposes five keys to more effective apprenticeship training in order to develop, respecting the principle of subsidiarity, further quality apprenticeship training in Europe and guidelines for action to be taken both at national and Community level. It is, however, important to bear in mind that the large variations between apprenticeship training systems reflect the different institutional structures as well as the social and economic situations in the Member States. Thus, the application of the guidelines for action set out further below would clearly need to be adapted to the particular national context.

## **2. Dynamic reforms with similar objectives**

In many Member States, it is subject to important reforms aimed at raising the quality and attractiveness of schemes, and at adapting them to industrial change and the needs of the labour market. Analyses of these reforms, illustrated by specific examples, suggest that Member States are trying to:

- ***Narrow the gap between schools and the workplace***

### **In Sweden:**

Apprenticeship training as such does not exist, but since 1992 workplace training corresponding to at least 15% of total teaching time is included in all vocational programmes in upper secondary education. Advisory bodies, involving schools and local trade unions and industry, play an important role in the provision of training, purchase of equipment, and preparation of supervisors.

**In Finland:**

The relative position of apprenticeship vis-à-vis other forms of education and training has been improved by legislation that came into force in 1993. It is flexible, suiting the needs of enterprises and the individuals, leads to the same vocational qualifications as training at an educational institution and offers opportunities for further vocational training. From a mere 4,000 apprentices in the 1970s, numbers rose to over 18,000 in 1996 and apprenticeship is expected to count for 16% of all participants in basic education and re-education by the year 2000.

- *Get closer to market needs*

**In Spain:**

Since 1988, decentralisation has brought about greater flexibility and more responsiveness to sectoral and local industrial needs. Training in work centres is integrated into full-time vocational education by means of compulsory three-month training modules. Placements are agreed by local companies, trade unions and schools.

**In Luxembourg:**

The social partners work together in professional chambers. Those responsible for a particular sector decide with the Ministry of Employment which trades or occupations should include apprenticeships, they draw up practical, on-the-job training, help to prepare vocational theory courses, determine the form of the final apprenticeship examination and, together with the Ministry, award the final certificates.

**In Portugal:**

Since the creation of the tripartite Institute of Employment and Vocational Training and its regional centres, the social partners have been playing an increasingly important role in vocational training. They are involved in the coordination and management of certification, promotion of training activities and organisation of training programmes.

- *Promote job flexibility and mobility*

**In Germany:**

The need for qualifications rather than mere skills was recognised as early as the late 1970s. Since then more emphasis has been put on transferable competencies such as the capacity to plan, handle methodologies, think in terms of systems, and develop social communication skills, a sense of responsibility and a critical mind. Given the high level of occupational mobility in Germany, these changes have brought added flexibility to the labour market.

**In Denmark:**

Since 1992, Danish legislation allows young people in initial vocational training to spend periods of work placement abroad as an integral part of their course. Funds are made available through the Employers' Reimbursement System to finance the trainee's extra costs during his/her transnational experience.

- ***Fight social exclusion***

**In Italy:**

Training-employment contracts have been developed and given statutory backing to encourage employers to train young people aged between 15 and 29 (32 for women) with a particular emphasis on those in situation of exclusion. Contracts may be renewed, usually after 24 months. More than half a million young people are now covered by such contracts.

- ***Raise the educational level of apprentice diplomas***

**In France:**

A 1987 reform has led to the extension of courses leading to higher-level diplomas, including that of qualified engineer. This has helped to expand the range of host companies and to generate interest in this kind of contract in new sectors. In 1992 around 25,000 apprentices were involved in apprenticeship courses leading to a higher level. By 1995 the number had grown to nearly 60,000.

**In the Netherlands:**

Three levels of certificates can now be attained in the Dutch apprenticeship scheme. Those who follow the traditional first-level course have access to the second and third levels. This is a necessary response to changing skill requirements, which are now significantly higher than they used to be in some sectors. In recent years, about 40% of the participants have followed a course at secondary or tertiary level.

- ***Give apprentices access to higher education***

**In the United Kingdom:**

It is a policy objective shared by the social partners, to encourage progression, where appropriate, from Modern Apprenticeships to Higher Education. Profiles of Modern Apprentices are being recognised by Universities and Colleges Admission Services as potentially eligible for university entry.

**In Austria:**

A legislative proposal for the *Berufsreifprüfung*, an entry examination to university, has already been agreed by the social partners and the government. It is also the subject of a Leonardo da Vinci Community-funded project.

### 3. Five keys to more effective apprenticeship training

#### **Key 1: Expand and Develop New Forms of Apprenticeship Training**

**Objective:** to expand and develop new forms of apprenticeship training by increasing the number of training places, using new distance learning technologies, and developing training in growth sectors and for emerging occupations.

Although there are obvious exceptions, apprenticeship training is generally overrepresented in sectors with relatively poor growth prospects such as construction, car-repair and hairdressing. It is not very evident in the service sector, and where it can be found it is too often in areas with the lowest growth rates. There are also indications that apprentices are scarce in sectors with high rates of innovation, such as the whole of the information services sector.

The distribution of training over a wide spectrum of economic sectors also relates to SMEs, whose role in job creation is extremely important and whose participation in apprenticeship training is vital for its future existence. In Germany, for example, more than half of the trainees are in businesses with fewer than 50 employees. The extent to which businesses offer training places directly relates to the economic cycle. During periods of recession the cost to enterprises of training apprentices and the question of funding them becomes crucial. In this context, it is important to capitalize on the potential offered by new information technologies. The use of telematics may contribute to the cost-efficiency of apprenticeship training, by providing theoretical knowledge through the use of distance teaching and Internet and thus reducing physical attendance at school.

Status within the overall educational system is crucial for the attractiveness of apprenticeship training. Young people are encouraged to participate when they are persuaded that apprenticeship can genuinely improve their career prospects. This means it should offer higher qualifications, lead to higher educational levels and enjoy equal status within education and training systems.

#### ***Action proposals:***

- Member States should continue efforts to create financial incentives for businesses to supply additional training places. In this context, SMEs and their important role in apprenticeship training should be taken into consideration.
- Besides financial incentives, Member States should seek to improve the commitment of businesses to participate in apprenticeship training by providing a more flexible legal framework as well as an expansion of qualifications towards higher levels of education and a focus on emerging occupations.
- The possibilities provided by multimedia tools to apprentices should be further investigated in order to get the best use of their potential.

- A qualitative survey throughout Europe will be undertaken by the Commission with a focus on the role of enterprises in apprenticeship training. The survey will identify best practice and important innovation measures as well as the factors that can help improve commitment to supply training places.

## **Key 2: Raise the Quality of Training**

**Objective:** improve the quality of apprenticeship training in terms of pedagogy, contents and organisation so as to strike a balance between theory and work-place training, and between the needs of enterprises and of the individual.

Greater complexity of work systems requires workers to communicate, work in teams, react flexibly and solve problems on their own initiative. By its very nature (combining theory and work experience), apprenticeship training has considerable potential for equipping individuals to meet these needs.

Practical experience of real-life situations adds meaning and relevance to the learning environment which, in turn, increases motivation and learning efficiency. Combined attendance at school and enterprise is not, however, sufficient unless training content has been integrated. This requires close co-operation and interaction between enterprises and the educational systems and, crucially, well-qualified trainers (tutors) in the workplace.

Although a rapid transition from training to working life is important, apprenticeship schemes should also recognise that the individual remains employable in the long-term if skills are transferable and regularly updated. In order to achieve this, schemes must provide the key competences that are essential foundations for lifelong learning.

### **Action proposals:**

- Member States should adapt curricula so as to narrow the gap between initial and continuing training. Important ingredients would include courses which widen general knowledge and supply social and other skills common to a wide range of occupations. These would be the basis for lifelong learning and enhanced long-term employment prospects.
- The Commission will contribute by putting more emphasis in the Leonardo da Vinci programme on fostering qualitative improvements in apprenticeship training by means of the exchange of trainers/tutors and other relevant actors in enterprises and educational institutions.

## **Key 3: Encourage the mobility of apprentices**

**Objective:** Add a European dimension to apprenticeship training by facilitating mobility of apprentices and recognition of training periods undertaken in other Member States.

The status of apprentices differs widely; in some countries it is based on a training contract similar to a work contract, in others where schemes are more school-based,

the apprentice is considered to be a student. These variations hamper cross-border mobility and recognition of training undertaken in another Member State. This is particularly important as a versatile workforce is needed to take full advantage of the growing opportunities provided by the Single Market and the global economy.

***Action proposals:***

- Promoting apprenticeship training with a European dimension. The Commission is currently working on a proposal to develop a common legal framework to promote apprenticeship training in Europe.
- When revising the Leonardo da Vinci action programme, the Commission will place special emphasis on a mobility scheme for apprentices along the lines of Socrates/Erasmus.
- The Commission and the Member States should support and promote opportunities for mobility through a system for gathering, co-ordinating and supplying information on possibilities for transnational placements, in particular within the EURES-system.

***Key 4: Involve the social partners.***

**Objective:** to involve social partners as widely as possible in enhancing and developing apprenticeship training.

The social partners play a crucial role in ensuring that apprenticeship successfully competes in the labour market through recognition of its qualifications, adaptation of curricula to new developments, and the provision of training places in any type of businesses.

In some countries, the social partners are involved in the making of legislation, policy-making and administration, developing training content, monitoring and certification. Their involvement appears to be vital for conferring the necessary status, and therefore attractiveness, on apprenticeship training, as well as helping to make systems more responsive to new developments.

***Action proposals:***

- The Commission and Member States should set up networks of pilot projects for fostering apprenticeship training in growing and innovative sectors and give the social partners a responsible role in their operation.
- Strengthen discussions on apprenticeship training within the Social Dialogue, placing particular emphasis on training in newly emerging sectors and securing a sufficient supply of training places. This subject will be addressed for the first time on the occasion of the discussion on "access to skills" which the Commission will launch next autumn.

## **5. Towards real strategies for apprenticeship training**

**Objective:** to facilitate the exchange of best practice and provide everyone concerned (decision-makers, policy-makers, social partners, schools and training providers, and enterprises) with indicators which allow them to monitor the development of apprenticeship training in Europe and develop real strategies.

Member States' efforts to reform training schemes are a mark of determination and dynamism. But differences between schemes and terminologies should not be allowed to hamper the search for common approaches to common problems.

### ***Action proposals:***

- The Commission, with the contribution of the Member States, could draw up regular reports on apprenticeship training in the Member States, using a common definition, consistent classification, and key data to assure the comparability of the different schemes.
- The Commission, in partnership with the Member States, could establish a benchmarking system for apprenticeship training, notably in the context of the benchmarking on youth which is in progress in the Employment and Labour Market Committee. With the help of this data, debate between all involved will be stimulated and help to find new promotion and development strategies.

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