



EUROPEAN  
COMMISSION

Brussels, 5.10.2017  
COM(2017) 563 final

2017/0244 (NLE)

Proposal for a

**COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION**

**on a European Framework for  
Quality and Effective Apprenticeships**

{SWD(2017) 322 final}

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## **EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUM**

### **1. CONTEXT OF THE PROPOSAL**

#### **• Reasons for and objectives of the proposal**

The proposal for a European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships contributes to the EU's priority on jobs, growth and investment. It follows up to the 2016 New Skills Agenda for Europe and its ambition to improve the quality and relevance of skills formation and the 2016 Communication on Investing in Europe's Youth, calling for a renewed effort to support young people acquire the knowledge, skills and experiences that will prepare them for their first job, pursue a successful professional career and become active citizens.

Apprenticeships are a particularly effective form of work-based learning in vocational education and training that eases the transition from education and training into work. They provide the skills that employers need, and enhance the competitiveness and productivity of companies and workplaces. While most apprentices are young learners, apprenticeships are also increasingly offered to older workers to gain a qualification that increases their employability and opportunities for career development.

Due to their proven effectiveness in easing people's access to the labour market, and improving their career chances, apprenticeships are a policy priority in the EU, while youth unemployment (16.9% in July 2017) in the EU remains more than double the overall unemployment rate (7.7% in July 2017).

Evidence from Cedefop and the European Semester process show that most Member States are pursuing significant apprenticeship reforms, and there is a strong push to boost apprenticeship supply.

The positive effects of apprenticeships on labour market conditions and youth employability depend on their quality. Apprenticeship schemes are widespread, but organised very differently, across the EU. The OECD has emphasised that high-quality standards are needed to avoid that apprenticeships are geared towards low-skilled jobs. Even a small proportion of low-quality offers can damage their overall reputation.<sup>1</sup>

This Recommendation builds on the latest evidence in the area, and provides orientation on how to put in place apprenticeship schemes that work and deliver results for both apprentices and employers.

Moreover, the mutual trust generated by commonly agreed criteria can have a positive impact on the mobility of apprentices.

This Recommendation complements the Union initiatives facilitating young people's transition to employment, notably the Council Recommendation on a Quality Framework for Traineeships.

**The overall objective** is to increase the employability and personal development of apprentices and to contribute to the development of a highly skilled and qualified workforce, responsive to labour market needs.

**The specific objective** is to provide a coherent framework for apprenticeships based on a common understanding of what defines quality and effectiveness, taking into account the diversity of vocational education and training (VET) systems in Member States.

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<sup>1</sup> OECD (2017), Striking the right balance - Costs and benefits of apprenticeship

It will support apprenticeship reforms in Member States, in order to underpin the quality and effectiveness of apprenticeships.

- **Scope of the proposal**

The Recommendation encourages Member States to apply a comprehensive and coherent set of criteria for quality and effective apprenticeships. For the purpose of this Recommendation apprenticeships are understood as follows:

*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.*

This definition is broad enough to cover the various forms of apprenticeship schemes existing across Member States and has been developed and used in the context of the European Alliance for Apprenticeships.

- **The political context**

Through the Rome Declaration<sup>2</sup> of 25 March 2017 the European leaders pledged to work towards a "Union where young people receive the best education and training and can study and find jobs across the continent". Quality and effective apprenticeships are an essential part of this pledge as they provide young people with skills that provide access to the labour market.

The European Pillar of Social Rights<sup>3</sup>, presented on 26 April 2017, sets out 20 key principles and rights to support fair and well-functioning labour markets and welfare systems. These are structured around three categories, all of which are relevant for providing quality and effective apprenticeships: 1) equal opportunities and access to the labour market; 2) fair working conditions; 3) social protection and inclusion. The first principle is that everyone has the right to quality and inclusive education, training and life-long learning in order to maintain and acquire skills that enable them to participate fully in society and successfully manage transitions in the labour market.

- **Apprenticeships on the political agenda**

In June 2016, the New Skills Agenda for Europe<sup>4</sup> underlined that business and social partners should be involved in designing and delivering work-based VET and apprenticeships. The Commission declared its intention to support opportunities for more work-based learning, to develop a set of support services for knowledge sharing, networking and cooperation on apprenticeships, and to support social partners' in taking forward their joint work with a possible Quality Framework for Apprenticeships. This commitment was confirmed in the December 2016 Communication on Investing in Europe's Youth outlining the intention to present an initiative to advance the quality, supply, attractiveness and inclusiveness of apprenticeships.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2017/03/25-rome-declaration/>

<sup>3</sup> COM (2017) 250 final and C (2017) 2600 final

<sup>4</sup> COM (2016) 381 final

<sup>5</sup> COM(2016) 940 final

The New Skills Agenda built on past initiatives like the European Alliance for Apprenticeships (EAfA) that was launched in 2013 with the aim to strengthen the quality, supply and image of apprenticeships, and (more recently) the mobility of apprentices. 27 Member States<sup>6</sup> have joined the EAfA by making national commitments, and over 200 pledges have been made by companies, social partners, vocational education and training providers and other stakeholders. Over 700,000 apprenticeships, traineeships and first jobs offers have been mobilised through these pledges.

The Council Recommendation of 22 April 2013 on establishing a Youth Guarantee<sup>7</sup> recommends that Member States ensure that all young people under the age of 25 years receive a good-quality offer of employment, continued education, an apprenticeship or a traineeship within four months of becoming unemployed or leaving formal education. By late 2016, approximately 390,000 apprenticeships had been offered under the Youth Guarantee.

The European Court of Auditors has called for the establishment of quality attributes for apprenticeships to be supported from the Union budget<sup>8</sup>, and the European Parliament<sup>9</sup> has called for measures to ensure that quality standards are introduced for apprenticeships. A recent study from the Parliament addresses the need to clarify the issues of an employment contract and remuneration in apprenticeships<sup>10</sup>.

In 2015, European governments and social partners agreed on the Riga conclusions for medium-term deliverables (2015-2020) in vocational education and training. One priority is to "Promote work-based learning in all its forms, with special attention to apprenticeships, by involving social partners, companies, chambers and VET providers, as well as by stimulating innovation and entrepreneurship."

As of May 2018, Member States will publish vacancies for apprenticeships based on a work contract in EURES<sup>11</sup>. Improved transparency will make it easier to match candidates with offers available in other countries. It will also encourage cooperation on apprenticeship mobility provided by Erasmus+ and beyond.

- **Existing work on quality and effectiveness**

Under the umbrella of the EAfA, important efforts have been made to strengthen evidence on the issues of quality and effectiveness of apprenticeships. On 15 October 2013, Member States adopted a Council Declaration on the European Alliance for Apprenticeships. It outlined common guiding principles for the effectiveness and attractiveness of apprenticeships, to be encouraged and followed where appropriate and according to national circumstances.

Within the Strategic Framework - Education and Training (ET2020) a Working Group on Vocational education and training (2014-2015) comprising representatives from Member States, social partners and VET providers developed 20 guiding principles for high-performance apprenticeships and work-based learning, focussing on four topics: 1) National

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<sup>6</sup> All the EU Member States apart from the United Kingdom. Also, all 5 Candidate countries and 3 EFTA countries (Iceland, Norway, Switzerland) have made national commitments.

<sup>7</sup> JO, 2013/C 120/01

<sup>8</sup> European Court of Auditors, Special report no 3/2015: EU Youth Guarantee: first steps taken but implementation risks ahead

<sup>9</sup> European Parliament, Report on Erasmus+ and other tools to foster mobility in VET – a lifelong learning approach, (2015/2257(INI))

<sup>10</sup> European Parliament, Skills development and employment: Apprenticeships, internships and volunteering, Study for the Employment and Social Affairs Committee, 2017

<sup>11</sup> Regulation (EU) 2016/589

governance and social partners' involvement; 2) Support for companies, in particular SMEs, offering apprenticeships; 3) Attractiveness of apprenticeships and improved career guidance; 4) Quality assurance in work-based learning.

With financial support from the Commission, the cross-industry European social partners worked on the quality (ETUC) and cost-effectiveness (led by BusinessEurope on behalf of the EU cross-industry employers' organisations) of apprenticeships. They agreed in June 2016 on the joint statement Towards a Shared Vision of Apprenticeships.

Initiated by ETUC and BusinessEurope, the tripartite Advisory Committee on Vocational Training (ACVT) - bringing together governmental and social partner representatives from all Member States - adopted in December 2016 an Opinion on A Shared Vision for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships and Work-based Learning that lists 16 elements to be considered when setting up apprenticeships schemes.

## **2. LEGAL BASIS, SUBSIDIARITY AND PROPORTIONALITY**

- Legal basis**

To the extent that apprenticeships are underpinned by a work contract, apprentices are by default both VET learners and workers. Therefore, the legal basis for this initiative lies in Articles 153, 166 and 292 TFEU.

According to Article 166 TFEU, the Union shall implement a vocational training policy which shall support and supplement the action of the Member States, while fully respecting the responsibility of the Member States for the content and organisation of vocational training.

According to Article 153 TFEU, the Union shall support and complement Member States' activities in the field of, *inter alia*, working conditions, social security and social protection of workers (apprentices with a work contract are considered as workers), and also the integration of persons excluded from the labour market and the combating of social exclusion.

According to Article 292 TFEU, the Council can adopt recommendations on the basis of a Commission proposal in the areas of EU competence.

- Subsidiarity (for non-exclusive competence)**

In its work towards the development of quality education and training and the implementation of a vocational training policy, the EU is responsible for encouraging co-operation between Member States, supporting and supplementing their action where necessary. In this context, establishing a common understanding of what constitutes quality and effective apprenticeships across the European Union is a task that can only be addressed at the European level.

A European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships will support and supplement national action in this area in line with Articles 166 TFEU and 153 TFEU. This initiative applies the subsidiarity principle, by fully taking into account that education and training systems, as well as functioning of the labour market and working conditions, are a national competence. The initiative fully respects the diversity of national apprenticeship systems, while proposing a set of common criteria to underpin those different schemes, ensuring benefits for both the learner and the companies providing apprenticeship opportunities.

The initiative will improve the transparency and mutual understanding of apprenticeship systems and in particular the quality and effectiveness of apprenticeships across the EU. This

may also have a positive impact on cross border mobility of apprenticeship graduates as a coordinated approach at EU level would ensure synergies and cooperation, maximising positive spill-overs.

Moreover, offering guidelines at EU level contributes to creating a shared understanding of how the quality of apprenticeships can be improved. This may also help Member States in their use of the European Structural and Investment Funds, in particular of the European Social Fund, and when implementing the Youth Employment Initiative, addressing unemployment, and in particular youth unemployment and inactivity.

- **Proportionality**

The actions proposed under the Recommendation are proportional to the pursued objectives. The proposal for a Council Recommendation will support the reform processes launched by individual countries on apprenticeships, and will complement Member States' efforts in this area in the context of the European Semester framework of Economic Governance. The proposed action respects Member States' practices and the diversity of systems. It accommodates for a differentiated approach reflecting Member States' different economic, financial and social situations and the diverse labour market conditions. Using existing monitoring mechanisms under the European Semester will ensure that no additional administrative burden will be created.

- **Choice of the instrument**

The proposed instrument is a proposal for a Council Recommendation, which respects the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality. It builds on the existing body of European law and is in line with the type of instruments available for European action in the areas of education and training and employment. As a legal instrument, it signals the commitment of Member States to the measures laid down in this Recommendation and provides a strong political basis for cooperation at European level in this area, while fully respecting Member States competence in the field of education and training and social policies.

### **3. RESULTS OF EX-POST EVALUATIONS, STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATIONS AND IMPACT ASSESSMENTS**

- **Ex-post evaluations/fitness checks of existing legislation**

Not applicable.

- **Stakeholder consultations**

The Recommendation reflects discussions and consultations with relevant stakeholders, including social partners, business, intermediary bodies such as chambers of industry, commerce and crafts, professional and sectorial organisations, education and training providers, youth, student and parent organisations, as well as local, regional and national authorities.

In order to ensure an even deeper and broader involvement of European cross-industry and sectoral social partners, and the chambers of commerce and industry, hearings were organised on 30 March and 7 June 2017. The consulted stakeholders underlined that the proposal should:

- build on the ACVT Opinion, and particularly its annex on Elements on apprenticeships and the partnership approach;

- provide a clear scope, while acknowledging the variety of Member States' systems and therefore the difficulty to provide a commonly agreed definition of apprenticeships and its distinction from other forms of work-based learning;
- reflect the need for both quality and effectiveness of apprenticeships, in line with the Joint Statement of the European social partners and the ACVT Opinion;
- include mobility as an element of, but not a prerequisite for, quality and effective apprenticeships.

Discussions were held in the meeting of the Advisory Committee on Vocational Training on 20 April 2017. In addition to the points already mentioned, the ACVT advised the Commission to:

- provide clarity on exactly what the proposal covers, i.e. whether for apprenticeships in a strict sense or also covering other forms of work-based learning;
- make it clear how the proposal links to other relevant platforms and initiatives, such as the European Alliance for Apprenticeships, European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET) and The European job mobility portal EURES;

Some governmental members of the ACVT were concerned about the potential wide scope of the framework when it comes to quality criteria and governance issues.

The Commission underlined that although the proposal would build on the ACVT Opinion, to which government representatives and European social partners had already agreed, it would not bind the Member States in the Council. It also stressed its intention to propose a framework that is clear, relevant and makes a difference for Member States and stakeholders.

There have also been consultations with the Director Generals of Vocational Training, European VET provider associations and stakeholders involved in the European Alliance for Apprenticeships.

- **Impact assessment**

Given the complementary approach of the proposed activities to Member States' initiatives, the voluntary nature of the proposed activities and the scope of the impacts expected, the extent to which impacts can be clearly identified ex ante is limited and therefore an impact assessment was not carried out. The proposal was developed on the basis of evidence collected in studies, through consultations of key stakeholders, and the dedicated work of European social partners and the ACVT.

- **Regulatory fitness and simplification**

Not applicable.

#### **4. BUDGETARY IMPLICATIONS**

The large variations in apprenticeship systems and the flexibility in implementing this Recommendation make it difficult to estimate national budgetary implications. While there may be start-up costs, higher quality and effectiveness in apprenticeships should in the long run lead to budgetary gains at national and/or regional level, at company or employer level, and for vocational education and training providers. Public budgets may benefit from higher employability and reduced spending on unemployment, while companies may benefit from improved productivity and competitiveness.

The Staff Working Document accompanying this proposal outlines three areas where the Council Recommendation may have cost implications:

- Compliance

There may be costs related to the compliance with the Recommendation, such as costs related to pay or compensation, financial subsidies or incentives, and provision of trainers and mentors for pedagogical support. Depending on the set-up, such costs will be shared between public budgets and employers providing training. Funding may for example be supplied over a national budget or through specific levies, taxes or voluntary contributions.

- Administration

The set-up and implementation of quality measures may involve administrative costs which are either one-off (or set-up) costs or ongoing (or repeated) costs. Although the Framework is established at the European level, there may be administrative costs at the national or regional level.

- Implementation

There are likely to be certain costs related to the implementation and follow-up of criteria for quality and effective apprenticeships. Depending on how the roles and responsibilities are organised, such costs may fall on public authorities, intermediary bodies or education and training providers.

Improving the quality and effectiveness of apprenticeships should lead to higher levels of skills, employability, and productivity. The OECD has found that well-designed apprenticeship schemes can be a worthwhile investment both for employers and apprentices, facilitate the transition of young people from school to work, and support competitiveness and economic growth.

The Recommendation does not require additional EU budget or staff resources for the Commission.

## 5. OTHER ELEMENTS

- **Implementation plans and monitoring, evaluation and reporting arrangements**

At the national level, the proposal for a Council Recommendation invites the Member States to promote the active involvement of social partners in the design, governance and implementation of apprenticeship schemes, in line with national industrial relations systems and education and training practices. Member States should also include the relevant measures in their National Reform Programmes under the European Semester, and take this Framework into account when making use of Union funding and instruments.

The Commission is invited to monitor the application of the framework with the support of the ACVT, building on existing reporting arrangements within the European Semester, and to report back to the Council within three years.

- **Explanatory documents (for directives)**

Not applicable.

- **Detailed explanation of the specific provisions of the proposal**

## **Recommendations to Member States**

Taking into account the diversity of national structures and systems, the framework will offer a set of criteria to cater for quality and effective apprenticeships, while allowing different elements of these criteria to be prioritised in each Member State depending on the specificities and different needs of the national apprenticeship schemes. This flexibility is essential, given the large variations in national systems and the various potential policy solutions which can be applied at the national level.

The Recommendation distinguishes between two sets of criteria: one on the necessary learning and working conditions in apprenticeship schemes, and one on the framework conditions for apprenticeships at system level.

### **Criteria for learning and working conditions**

To ensure the quality and effectiveness of apprenticeship schemes, the Recommendation covers the following seven criteria for learning and working conditions:

(1) Written contract; (2) Learning outcomes; (3) Pedagogical support; (4) Workplace component; (5) Pay and/or compensation; (6) Social protection; (7) Work, health and safety conditions.

### **Criteria for framework conditions**

The Recommendation also covers the following seven criteria for framework conditions that have to be in place to support the set up and functioning of quality and effective apprenticeships:

(8) Regulatory framework; (9) Involvement of social partners; (10) Support for companies; (11) Flexible pathways and mobility; (12) Career guidance and awareness raising; (13) Transparency; (14) Quality assurance and graduate tracking.

Further explanations on each of the criteria are provided in the accompanying Staff Working Document.

### **Follow up at EU level**

The Recommendation includes provisions on developing a set of support services for knowledge sharing, networking and mutual learning to assist Member States and relevant stakeholders to implement apprenticeship schemes in line with this Framework. This is a follow up to the Commission Communication "Investing in Europe's Youth" which announced the set up of demand driven apprenticeships support service, building on the successful public employment services benchlearning model and supporting countries to introduce or reform apprenticeship systems.

It also proposes further work on awareness raising and to support the implementation of this framework through relevant EU funding.

Proposal for a

## COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION

### on a European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

Having regard to the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, and in particular Articles 153, 166 and 292 thereof,

Having regard to the proposal from the European Commission

Whereas:

- (1) Quality and effective apprenticeships that lead to a combination of job related skills, work based experience and learning, and key competences facilitate young people's entry in the labour market, as well as adults' career progression and transition into employment.
- (2) Well-designed apprenticeship schemes benefit both employers and learners. High quality standards avoid that apprenticeships are geared towards low-skilled jobs and poor training that damage their reputation. Good quality apprenticeships also contribute to social inclusion by integrating disadvantaged learners and people with a migrant background into the labour market.
- (3) Quality and effective apprenticeships are established through structured partnerships involving all relevant stakeholders, particularly social partners, businesses, intermediary bodies such as chambers of industry, commerce and crafts, professional and sectorial organisations, vocational education and training providers, youth and parent organisations, as well as local, regional and national authorities. Since 2013, the Commission in cooperation with Member States and relevant stakeholders promotes the supply, quality and image of apprenticeship through the European Alliance for Apprenticeships, which has so far mobilised more than 700 000 offers for apprenticeships, traineeships or first jobs offers. Business led initiatives like the European Pact for Youth have mobilised more offers and helped promote business-education partnerships across the Union.
- (4) The European cross-industry social partners have collected evidence building on quality and cost-effectiveness of apprenticeships through their parallel work and their Joint Statement Towards a Shared Vision of Apprenticeships from June 2016 that was the basis for the opinion on A Shared Vision for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships and Work-based Learning adopted on 2 December 2016 by the Advisory Committee on Vocational Training (ACVT).

- (5) The European Qualifications Framework (EQF) first established in 2008 and revised in 2017<sup>12</sup>, improves the transparency, comparability and portability of citizens' qualifications, including apprentices.
- (6) The Council Recommendation of 18 June 2009 on a European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET)<sup>13</sup> established a reference instrument to help Member States promote and monitor continuous improvement of their vocational education and training systems.
- (7) Through the 2012 European Quality Charter on Internships and Apprenticeships, the European Youth Forum urged the European countries, European institutions and social partners to establish or reinforce legal quality frameworks for apprenticeships.
- (8) The Council Recommendation of 22 April 2013 on establishing a Youth Guarantee<sup>14</sup> recommends that Member States ensure that all young people under the age of 25 years receive a good-quality offer of employment, continued education, an apprenticeship or a traineeship within four months of becoming unemployed or leaving formal education.
- (9) The European social partners, the European Commission and the Council of the European Union engaged to contribute to the supply, quality and attractiveness of apprenticeships in a Joint Declaration establishing the European Alliance for Apprenticeships on 2 July 2013.
- (10) The Council Declaration on the European Alliance for Apprenticeships from 15 October 2013 noted that the effectiveness and attractiveness of apprenticeship should be encouraged by their adherence to several common guiding principles.
- (11) The Council Recommendation on a Quality Framework for Traineeships<sup>15</sup> adopted on 10 March 2014 established a number of principles to improve the quality of traineeships outside formal education and training.
- (12) The Riga Conclusions of 22 June 2015, endorsed by the Ministers in charge of vocational education and training, made work-based learning in all its forms, with special attention to apprenticeships, and developing quality assurance mechanisms, two of the five European priorities for the period 2015-2020.
- (13) The Education and Training 2020 Working Group on Vocational Education and Training developed 20 guiding principles on high-performance apprenticeships and work-based learning during its mandate 2014-2015.
- (14) In its report on Erasmus+ and other tools to foster mobility in vocational education and training – a lifelong learning approach of 4 March 2016, the European Parliament called for measures to ensure quality standards for apprenticeships.
- (15) Regulation (EU) 2016/589 of the European Parliament and of the Council<sup>16</sup> stipulates that apprenticeships based on an employment contract can be advertised on EURES - The European job mobility portal as of May 2018.

<sup>12</sup> OJ C 189/15

<sup>13</sup> OJ C 155, 8.7.2009, p.1

<sup>14</sup> OJ C 120, 26.4.2013, p 1

<sup>15</sup> OJ C 88, 27.3.2014, p.1

<sup>16</sup> OJ L 107, 22.4.2016, p. 1

- (16) In its Communication of 10 June 2016 on A New Skills Agenda for Europe the Commission stressed its support to social partners to take forward the results of their joint projects, for example establishing a quality framework for apprenticeships.
- (17) The Commission Communication Investing in Europe's Youth from 7 December 2016<sup>17</sup>, called for a renewed effort to support young people to get the best possible start in life by investing in their knowledge, skills and experiences, helping them to find or train for their first job. The aim was to help young people seize opportunities, integrate well into society, become active citizens and pursue a successful professional career, including through a quality framework outlining key principles for apprenticeship schemes.
- (18) The Rome Declaration of 25 March 2017 includes the pledge to work towards a Union where young people receive the best education and training and can study and find jobs across the continent.
- (19) The European Pillar of Social Rights from 26 April 2017 sets out a number of principles to support fair and well-functioning labour markets and welfare systems, including the right to quality and inclusive education and training, to ensure skills relevant for the labour market and for participation in society. It sets out the Commission's ambition to propose a Council Recommendation which will define the key elements that should be in place to enable people to acquire relevant skills and qualifications through high quality apprenticeships programmes.
- (20) The Commission proposal for a Council Recommendation on graduate tracking adopted on 30 May 2017 aims to improve the availability of qualitative and quantitative information about what graduates, including apprentices, do after they complete their education and training.
- (21) The European Structural and Investment Funds (2014-2020), namely the European Social Fund (ESF) and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), as well as Erasmus+, the Union programme for the Competitiveness of Enterprises and Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (COSME), the Union Programme for Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI), and the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI), provide support for apprenticeships.
- (22) Recently, the European Parliament and stakeholders called on the Commission to boost long term mobility of apprentices across the EU, providing young people with the opportunity to develop both job specific skills and key competences. The Commission responded by introducing in the Erasmus+ programme a new activity called Erasmus Pro which specifically supports longer work placements abroad.
- (23) In its reports on the Youth Guarantee from 2015 and 2017, the European Court of Auditors recommends that the Commission develop quality criteria for apprenticeships and other offers supported under this initiative.
- (24) A common understanding among Member States of quality and effective apprenticeships supports their efforts to reform and modernise apprenticeship systems that provide an excellent learning and career pathway. A common understanding contributes to increasing mutual trust and thus facilitates cross-border mobility of apprentices.

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- (25) The overall objective of this Recommendation is to increase the employability and personal development of apprentices and to contribute to the development of a highly skilled and qualified workforce, responsive to labour market needs.
- (26) The specific objective is to provide a coherent framework for apprenticeships based on a common understanding of what defines quality and effectiveness, taking into account the diversity of vocational education and training (VET) systems in Member States.
- (27) For the purposes of this Recommendation, apprenticeships are understood 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.
- (28) This Recommendation does not prevent Member States from maintaining or establishing more advanced provisions for apprenticeships than the ones recommended here.

HAS ADOPTED THIS RECOMMENDATION,

Member States should, in accordance with national legislation and in close cooperation with stakeholders, ensure that apprenticeship schemes are responsive to labour market needs and provide benefits to both learners and employers, by building on the criteria for quality and effective apprenticeships set out below.

### **Criteria for learning and working conditions**

#### ***Written contract***

1. Before the start of the apprenticeship a written contract between the employer, the apprentice and the vocational training institution should be concluded, defining each party's rights and obligations related to training and work.

#### ***Learning outcomes***

2. A set of comprehensive learning outcomes should be defined by the employers and vocational training institutions ensuring a balance between specific job-related skills and key competences supporting both the personal development and lifelong career opportunities of the apprentices with a view to adapt to changing career patterns.

#### ***Pedagogical support***

3. In-company trainers should be designated and tasked to cooperate closely with vocational education and training providers and teachers to provide guidance to apprentices and to ensure mutual and regular feed-back. Teachers, trainers and mentors should be supported to update their skills and competences in order to train apprentices according to the latest teaching and training methods and labour market needs.

#### ***Workplace component***

4. A substantial part of the learning experience, meaning at least half of the apprenticeship duration, should be carried out in a workplace. This should include opportunities to undertake part of such placements abroad.

### ***Pay and/or compensation***

5. Apprentices should receive 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.

### ***Social protection***

6. Apprentices should be entitled to social protection, including necessary insurance in line with national legislation.

### ***Work, health and safety conditions***

7. The host workplace should comply with relevant rules and regulations on working conditions, in particular health and safety legislation.

### ***Criteria for framework conditions***

#### ***Regulatory framework***

8. A clear and consistent regulatory framework should be in place based on a fair and equitable partnership approach, including a structured and transparent dialogue among all relevant stakeholders. This may include accreditation procedures for companies and workplaces that offer apprenticeships.

#### ***Involvement of social partners***

9. Social partners, including at sectoral level, should be involved in the design, governance and implementation of apprenticeship schemes, in line with national industrial relations systems and education and training practices.

#### ***Support for companies***

10. Financial and/or non-financial support should be provided, particularly for small, medium-sized and micro-companies, based on cost-sharing arrangements between employers, apprentices and public authorities, enabling cost-effective apprenticeships for companies.

#### ***Flexible pathways and mobility***

11. Entry requirements for apprenticeships should take into account relevant informal and non-formal learning. Apprenticeships should lead to a nationally recognised qualification referenced in accordance with the European Qualifications Framework<sup>18</sup>, and should allow access to other learning opportunities, including at higher education and training levels, and career pathways. Transnational mobility of apprentices should be a component of apprenticeship qualifications.

#### ***Career guidance and awareness raising***

12. Career guidance, mentoring and learner support should be provided during the apprenticeship to ensure successful outcomes and reduce drop-outs. Apprenticeships should be promoted through awareness-raising activities.

#### ***Transparency***

13. The transparency of, and access to apprenticeship offers within and between Member States should be ensured with the support of public and private employment services, and by using Union tools such as EURES when appropriate.

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<sup>18</sup>

OJ C 189/15

## ***Quality assurance and graduate tracking***

14. Quality assurance approaches should be in place in coherence with European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET)<sup>19</sup>, including a valid and reliable assessment of the learning outcomes. The tracking of employment and career progression of the apprentices should be ensured.

## **Implementation at national level**

In order to implement this Recommendation, Member States should:

15. Promote the active involvement of social partners in the design, governance and implementation of apprenticeship schemes, in line with national industrial relations systems and education and training practices;
16. Include the relevant implementing measures in the National Reform Programmes under the European Semester;
17. Take into account this framework when making use of European Union funds and instruments supporting apprenticeships.

The Commission should provide the necessary support, including through the following actions:

## **Support services**

18. Developing a set of support services for knowledge sharing, networking and mutual learning to assist Member States and relevant stakeholders to implement apprenticeship schemes in line with this Framework;

## **Awareness-raising**

19. Promoting the excellence and attractiveness of apprenticeships through awareness raising campaigns such as the European Vocational Skills Week;

## **Funding**

20. Supporting the implementation of this Recommendation through relevant Union funding, in accordance with the relevant legal basis;

## **Follow-up**

21. Monitoring the implementation of this Recommendation with the support of the tripartite Advisory Committee on Vocational Training, building on reporting arrangements within the European Semester;
22. Reporting to the Council on the implementation of the Framework within three years from the date of its adoption.

Done at Brussels,

*For the Council  
The President*

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<sup>19</sup> OJ C 155, 8.7.2009, p.1