



## NOTE

### Thematic fiche on introducing apprenticeship-type schemes

REFERENCE: Annual peer review on reforming VET

#### 1. POLICY CONTEXT

While even the most labour-market relevant education and training cannot create sufficient jobs or increase demand, apprenticeships and other forms of work-based learning can provide high-quality training for young people and help match learning outcomes to the skills required (Cedefop, 2012a).

Until recently, shares of higher education graduates and, in some cases, upper secondary education in general were among the criteria used to indicate countries' competitiveness. Now, the IMD World Competitiveness Database includes the question whether apprenticeships are sufficiently implemented in the respective country <sup>(1)</sup>. The value of apprenticeships was also underlined at the 2013 Davos World Economic Forum meeting.

Already before 2010, a trend towards an apprenticeship revival was apparent (Cedefop, 2010c). Worryingly high youth unemployment and the good performance of countries with strong apprenticeships have moved these schemes high up on the EU and national policy agendas.

A wide range of policy documents, from *Youth on the move* to the *Bruges Communiqué*, the policy packages on youth employment and the *Youth Guarantee* Recommendation signal a strong political commitment to promoting apprenticeships and similar forms of work-based learning. As the Commission staff working document *Vocational education and training for better skills, growth and jobs* underlines, the challenge in many countries is to put these commitments into practice. The supply of apprenticeship places remains under-developed.

Several countries have received specific recommendations to reinforce or expand apprenticeships. The *European alliance for apprenticeship* launched in July 2013, aims to support these efforts through partnerships and peer learning between countries and different education and labour market actors <sup>(2)</sup>. In their

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<sup>(1)</sup> The questions are addressed to about 5000 business executives per year.

<sup>(2)</sup> Already at the end of 2012, Greece, Spain, Italy, Latvia and Portugal had signed a memorandum of understanding with Germany to cooperate in this field.

*Framework of actions on youth unemployment* the European social partners confirm their readiness to contribute to the alliance.

But can apprenticeships easily be embedded in other countries' education and training systems and their different approaches to governance?

Already the term apprenticeship, although commonly used, is defined and understood differently in many countries and for research purposes <sup>(3)</sup>. Based on definitions by ILO, Cedefop and Eurostat some key features can be derived:

- learning alternates between the workplace and an educational institution or training centre (dual principle <sup>(4)</sup>);
- the programme is part of formal (initial) education and training;
- the training is based on a contract/formal agreement between the employer and the learner (in some countries with the education and training institution), and learning outcomes/standards/training profiles devised by relevant authorities; the contracts are usually regulated by labour laws, vocational training acts or similar legislation.

However, in several cases, contracts or agreements are concluded between the enterprise and the education and training institution/centre or the organisation arranging the placements (e.g. in Poland or Spain). In some cases, like Estonia, the enterprise, the VET school and the learner are all required to sign the contract (European Commission, 2012a). In some schemes learners have the legal status of students and do not necessarily receive a remuneration.

Duration varies from 1 (in a few cases even less) up to 4 years. In countries with traditionally strong apprenticeship, the average duration is 3 years. The UK (England), for instance, only recently set a minimum duration of 12 months. The aim to make VET more inclusive has also led to different qualification levels within apprenticeships (e.g. partial qualifications, shorter programmes).

Apprenticeships also vary in terms of starting age and age limits, target groups, duration and share of in-company-based training. Starting age varies from the age of 15 (for instance in Austria or in Hungary where, following a recent reform, the in-company component now also starts in year 1 of the respective VET programmes) to over 20. In Germany, many young people take up apprenticeship after having acquired upper secondary leaving exams in general education that grant higher education access.

## **2. INTEGRATING APPRENTICESHIP-TYPE SCHEMES AS A NEW ELEMENT WITHIN VET SYSTEMS AND STARTING UP WITH THE FIRST GENERATION OF APPRENTICES**

The success of apprenticeships needs to be understood in their country contexts and the specific conditions that apply: predominant economic sectors, company size, degree of regulation and importance of licenses to access specific

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<sup>(3)</sup> See, for instance, European Commission (2012a).

<sup>(4)</sup> Although often associated with the German apprenticeship model, the term 'dual principle' more broadly refers to combining theory and practice at a workplace/in a real life situation.

occupations or exercise certain functions or liberal system. But also the challenges they face need to be taken into account.

To be successful, considering economic and labour market needs and the specific country context is crucial. The economic sectors and occupational fields a country wants to focus on will determine type and level of skills and qualifications that may be required. Based on these, countries could decide whether to build on existing programmes by adding or strengthening work-based learning component; which would be the most suitable type of work-based learning, apprenticeship-type schemes or others; whether to offer these at secondary, post-secondary or tertiary level and/or for labour market returners.

The 'dual principle' requires strong cooperation between training providers and schools. Starting small, i.e. piloting the new scheme in business sectors or industries that face skills shortages or where conditions are favourable and accompanying them by research and evaluation, can be helpful.

To be attractive and of value for learners, apprenticeship-type schemes need to be embedded in the formal education and training system and award recognised qualifications that are part of the national qualifications framework. This also entails progression opportunities, for instance from apprenticeship at upper secondary level to tertiary education, whether more professionally or academically oriented. One way to ease transition from apprenticeship-type schemes at upper secondary to tertiary level could be to establish programmes that combine learning at a higher education institution with company-based learning up to PhD level (INAP Commission, 2012).

This also means ensuring that knowledge, skills and competence that learners acquire are not too narrowly defined (e.g. for a sector or an occupational field and not just for a specific industry or employer). A mix of transversal and occupational skills is important to provide the grounds for further learning and empower people to adapt to occupational changes. To keep occupational profiles for apprenticeships transparent, developing a limited number of broadband apprenticeships could be helpful.

But setting up apprenticeships in addition to other (I)VET offers bears the risk that the different types of vocational training compete. Society may have preconceived views and not be aware of its benefits. Apart from awareness raising campaigns on the benefits of apprenticeships and targeted guidance and counselling, offering apprenticeships in newly emerging and prestigious sectors/industries is to be considered.

### **3. LEGAL AND REGULATORY FRAMEWORK - DEFINING ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

A consistent legal and a strong institutional framework play a key role in countries with strong apprenticeship-type training. Important dimensions include the willingness of firms to invest in training young people and the degree of public sector commitment.

Ideally, national legislation clearly defines the roles and responsibilities of the actors at different levels of governance in line with their competences and interests. It may also set rules for interaction and cooperation.

The division of responsibilities can take different forms, not least depending on a country's general education and training governance system and the degree of decentralisation. For instance, the national level could be in charge of setting strategic parameters and devising the legal framework and regulations while the responsibility for implementation is at regional/local level (e.g. putting curricula in place, applying examination standards, supervising VET schools, ensuring quality of enterprise-based training).

The specificity of apprenticeship requires also that the regulatory framework clearly defines the responsibilities, rights and obligations of employers, apprentices and school/education institution/training centres (e.g. status of learner, remuneration agreements, learning objectives at the different venues). This includes, for instance, prerequisites for enterprises to be entitled to train, qualification and competence requirements of teachers and trainers or exam regulations.

Standards for apprenticeships need to have a core element that can be found across a country and flexible elements that are adjusted to the prevailing conditions. Refraining from defining standards in great detail leaves room for implementation at regional/local level.

### **Cooperation of actors**

VET programmes based on the dual principle involve a wide range of actors – such as ministries of education, employment and economy, social partner organisations, VET institutions (heads of VET schools and teachers/trainers), enterprises (including trainers). This 'pluralistic' model requires strong commitment from all actors. Close cooperation between government and business (e.g. in designing occupational profiles, standards, conducting examinations, finding training positions) is key.

In countries with successful apprenticeships, dialogue among different actors takes place at all levels: national, regional and local. Cooperation may take a variety of forms, ranging from co-decision, to the 'consensus principle', to informal agreements. Mutual agreement (consensus principle) by representatives of government and social partners is an essential pillar for the social acceptance of apprenticeships.

Social partners have a key role in setting quality regulatory frameworks and devising administrative procedures at national level, as also the *Framework of actions on youth unemployment* underlines. Enforcing these frameworks would be the task of national governments. Social partners involvement in design and implementation of apprenticeship, in establishing, reviewing and up-dating of training/occupational standards is important to ensure they are responsive to labour market needs.

Austria, Germany, Switzerland, Denmark and the Netherlands, for instance, have a cooperative governance approach. In these models, the state and social

partners have clear roles. Initiatives to amend or renew training programmes or specific aspects due to changing skill requirements or problems experienced by apprentices on the labour market, for instance, can be channelled to the government through social partners or mediated by them. The state then makes formal decisions on changes which are implemented with support of the social partners (Cedefop, forthcoming).

#### **4. SECURING COMPANIES' INVOLVEMENT FOR THE START-UP PHASE**

The business/industry setting is essential, since it is the only place where learning can occur under real-life conditions. Introducing a strong in-company based component in VET or apprenticeship-type schemes alone does not necessarily result in high employer commitment, as is evident from England and Ireland.

Starting-up apprenticeships in one specific sector could be one option. To encourage small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to train young people, large companies could help by developing joint training schemes. As SMEs may not be able to cover all aspects of training profiles, training could be carried out in cooperation with other enterprises or training centres.

To get companies on board which lack experience in apprenticeship-type training may require support, incentives or low threshold forms of work-based learning. These could allow them to gather experience and understand the potential benefits of training young people.

One option could be to encourage enterprises in a first step to form partnerships with VET schools supporting them in various activities and in conducting other forms of work-based learning, like for instance training firms or business/industry projects. Another could be to start off with shorter spells of work placements and internships in the initial phase of the programme.

Chambers or sector organisations or other intermediary organisations could support, in particular, SMEs. For instance, they could relieve employers from administrative burdens and assist them in locating information on possible financial support (European Commission, 2013a).

But to create ownership, involving enterprises in designing standards based on learning outcomes, programmes and assessment is important. Transparent quality standards and documentation of competence tests indicate to companies what they can expect from apprentices after they have completed their training. To help them and social partners fulfil these tasks requires capacity building from the outset. International peer learning can be helpful.

#### ***Financial incentives***

To support employers there are also various financing models. The *Framework of actions for youth employment* suggests that Member States in cooperation with social partners could consider establishing national and/or sectoral training funds. These allow companies to contribute at different levels, e.g. solidarity contribution or industry fund. Companies in industries that derive net income from training

should be expected to contribute first. An industry-specific solidarity contribution such as in Germany would specifically support SMEs companies to afford the costs for high quality training.

Adjusting the respective shares of government-financed school-based phases and privately funded in-company training could also help encourage enterprises to buy in.

## **5. SUPPORTING IN-COMPANY TRAINERS**

The request for more training places in enterprises entails an increased need for trainers/tutors who support young people's learning process. This requires identifying in-company staff who can act as trainers and allowing them the necessary time to do so - a challenge for small enterprises. Trainers also need opportunities to acquire and update the necessary competences to ensure high quality apprenticeships and to work with learners of different background and skills levels.

Qualification and competence requirements of trainers differ from country to country. In most cases though, in-company trainers are expected to have a qualification in the occupation/occupational field they train young people for and have some proof of pedagogical competence. Training the trainers programmes are provided by the state/region, chambers, sectoral organisations as well as VET providers. They mainly aim to develop trainers' pedagogical competences, inform about the legal framework of apprenticeships and learning outcomes (knowledge, skills and competence) that apprentices have to acquire.

Evidence shows that national level support to training of trainers in enterprises is mostly linked to national VET reforms (e.g. Finland, Estonia, Malta), more specifically to the increased effort to (re)introduce or expand apprenticeship-type training and work-based learning more generally (e.g. Estonia, Finland, Malta, Romania, Spain, Sweden) or improve its quality (e.g. Austria, Germany, Switzerland). Systematic dialogue, joint facilities and/or training programmes for in-company trainers and teachers and trainers in VET schools and other education and training institutions could promote sustainable professional development.

## **6. CONCLUSIONS**

The successful establishment or expansion of a dual VET system depends on certain factors to be considered:

- Integrating apprenticeship-type schemes in education system as a learning pathway providing access and progression opportunities to and within higher education to be an attractive learning path for citizens.
- Commitment of employers - their involvement in provision, administering, financing and monitoring of apprenticeship-type schemes.
- Framework and rules in place encouraging cooperation between different actors at all levels and ensuring coordinated action. Involvement of social

partners (e.g. in defining VET curricula, occupational profiles) to ensure apprenticeship is responsive to the labour market needs.

- A consistent legal framework which clearly defines the roles and responsibilities of different actors involved at national, regional or local level and ensures that the competences and interest of different actors are adequately reflected in the system.
- Governance structures and financing arrangements providing incentives for employers to start apprenticeship and to maintain their commitment to invest in training.
- Support for training of in-company trainers as an integral part of the overall strategy of introducing apprenticeship and of engaging employers. Cooperation of different actors in providing support to trainers/apprentice tutors.

However, if interpreted only as a return to old concepts, the trend towards the dual principle is ill-understood. Learning in an enterprise and in an educational institution simultaneously can be helpful for different age groups and qualification levels. Work-based elements are also becoming more important in education and training for EQF level 5 and above. Already now, several countries' post-secondary or higher education programmes include substantial work-based learning elements or are inspired by the dual principle – a trend worth considering, as more young people today pursue higher education.

## 7. QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

Some main questions that need to be addressed:

- How can employers be encouraged to engage in setting up/reintroducing apprenticeship-type schemes in a country, in particular in liberal labour markets where access to occupations is less linked to specific education and training?
- How to develop the capacity of employer and employee organisations to participate in decision-making processes, governance and implementation of apprenticeships? How to approach this in countries where membership in these organisations is not compulsory?
- How can qualification standards (developed within the national qualification frameworks) be used to ensure the quality of apprenticeships (i.e. to ensure the common set of competences/learning outcomes to all apprentices irrespectively of where they have been trained)?
- How can better coordination and communication between workplace (trainers) and school (teachers) be ensured to achieve best learning outcomes of students?

## 8. SOME COUNTRY EXAMPLES

### Box 1 *Introducing apprenticeships – Spain*

Legislation of 2012 sets the principles for implementing VET based on the dual principle. It covers training and apprenticeship contracts and encourages participation of enterprises in formal IVET. One of the main aims is to improve employability of learners and ease their transition into the labour market. Given the large number of young people who have left education and training early and are low-qualified the new programmes are expected to help them return to education and training and upgrade their skills. Since 2012, regions have developed dual programmes and are piloting them. Sectoral agreements and legislation encourages participation of chambers and enterprises in helping develop and implement training programmes based on the dual principle. End 2012 a Memorandum of Understanding was signed between DE, LV, ES, PT, GR and IT to ease cooperation in VET, including promotion of work-based learning.

### Box 2 *Reinforcing the dual principle – Hungary*

The Hungarian government aims to align VET better to the needs of the labour market. Following an agreement with the government and recent VET legislation, the chamber of commerce and industry has been in the driving seat. All VET programmes have recently been revised. Starting from autumn 2013, in three-year programmes leading to skilled workers' level, the share of work-based learning has increased: in year 1 it takes place in school or dedicated company workshops (if training contract concluded already in year 1); years 2-3 include larger shares of company-based learning inspired by the dual principle. In comparison to the previous programme, this means that young people can acquire practical experience already as of the age of 14 instead of 16. General education and vocational theory are provided throughout the programme, albeit their share is lower than before. The chamber of commerce monitors contracts and has provided a support network, which may include helping learners to find training places. Companies' training fund contribution can be used up to a certain ceiling for training that is provided within cooperation agreements between VET institutions and companies. Since 2013 per capita payment reflects training cost by occupation.

### Box 3 *Defining roles and responsibilities*

In Switzerland, the vocational and professional education act (in force since 2004) grants all legislative power for the vocational education and training system to the federal level. This includes: upper secondary and tertiary level VET, job related continuing education and training, qualifications, training of VET professionals, career guidance, federal funding. In this comprehensive law, all actors in different sectors and levels (federal state, cantons, business organisations, etc.) are given clear roles and responsibilities and the rules regarding their interaction:

- Confederation, SERI (State Secretariat for Education Research and Innovation) – strategic management and development
- Swiss Federal Institute for VET (SFIVET) – provision of training to VET teachers and trainers and examiners; support to cantons, professional organisations and schools in developing programmes and implementing reforms; research and development



- Professional organisations – definition of VET training content and qualification procedures
- 26 cantons – operative function: implementation of VET, supervision of VET/VET qualification procedures

#### Box 4 **Cooperation between actors**

In Denmark, social dialogue exists at all levels of governance:

- National level: Vocational Training Council (approx. 30 social partner representatives); advises government on structure, accreditation of colleges, framework for content and assessment.
- Branch level: Trade committees (approx. 50 with 10-14 members from employer and employee organisations, responsible for over 100 IVET programmes), Their tasks comprise: defining the targets of each IVET programme; renewing, closing down outdated and establishing new programmes; conducting analyses and development projects in the particular trade; approving enterprises as qualified training establishments; issuing journeyman's certificate.
- Local level: Local education committees for each programme at each college (representatives from local employers and employees, staff, management and learners) facilitate the cooperation between colleges and local trade and industry and help determine specific programmes.
- Local level: VET college board (teachers, learners, representatives of administrative staff and social partners) cooperates with management in strategy development and is responsible for approval of budget and accounts. The director of the colleges refers to the board.

#### Box 5 **Financial incentives**

In Germany's construction industry all companies pay a percentage of their payroll costs into a fund, which is used to compensate companies for the fees and costs associated with intercompany training (if enterprises cannot cover the whole training profile, others or specific training centres take over), apprentices and/or a share of the wages paid to trainees.

In Switzerland a vocational training fund has been set up by professional organisations (*Organisationen der Arbeitswelt*); the government is able to make participation in this fund mandatory for all companies in a given industry (Art. 60 of Switzerland's Vocational Training Act).

In Denmark, all employers, both public and private, pay an amount into a fund called the employers' reimbursement scheme (*Arbejdsgivernes Elevrefusion*), regardless of whether or not they provide training placements. This fund finances both IVET and adult vocational (continuing) training. In 2012, all employers were obliged to pay an annual contribution of EUR 393 per full-time employee. These funds are then allocated to the places of work taking in apprentices so they do not bear the cost of training alone. These employers receive wage reimbursement during apprentices' periods of college-based training.

### Box 6 *Training in-company trainers*

In Austria often company owners themselves act as trainers or they appoint suitable employees to carry out this task. Larger companies also employ full-time trainers and training managers. Legislation requires IVET trainers to pass a specific exam to prove competence in the occupational field as well as pedagogy and Knowledge of the rules and regulations that apply by. This exam is waived for holders of certain qualifications and certificates, as for instance that of master craftspersons and those who complete a forty-hour IVET trainer course.

German enterprises are eligible to provide workplace training if at least one person has passed a trainer aptitude exam in line with the legislation and holds a respective qualification. Regional chambers offer training programmes to help candidates prepare for the exam. Chambers also provide training to trainers in SMEs.

Dutch companies that provide work placements are accredited by the Centres of Expertise on the basis of a common set of quality criteria agreed among the sectors, the availability of a competent trainer being one of them. The centres provide training and to trainers in the accredited companies or in those that seek accreditation.

In Poland, trainers are required to have a qualification and the necessary competence in the field – at least ‘master craftsman’ certificate and a pedagogical qualification.

The Finnish National Board of Education supports the training programme for in-company trainers as part of the government’s strategy to promote work-based learning and skill demonstrations. Content and guidelines are developed nationally, the training as such is the responsibility of VET providers. Although they are not mandatory, all providers use the guides to ensure quality and coherence of training.

In Sweden, efforts to strengthen apprenticeship have also led to national projects to train in-company trainers. Public funding is increasingly channelled to support school-company partnerships and to train trainers through national VET councils. One of the challenges identified is reaching trainers in enterprises and, as a result, their low participation.

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