

Higher-Level Apprenticeship in Italy

1. Introduction

Since the term “higher-level apprenticeship” is the translation into English of an Italian expression describing a new policy and type of contract, first of all a general definition of the concept of apprenticeship seems useful. The Cedefop publication “Terminology of vocational training policy”¹ defines apprenticeships as “systematic, long-term training alternating periods in a school or training centre and at the workplace; the apprentice is contractually linked to the employer and receives remuneration (wage or allowance)”.² The key feature that distinguishes apprenticeships from other form of alternate training is the fact that the apprentice is an employee, and is paid by the employer.

1. Description of the Main Elements of the Policy

1.1. Background

Apprenticeship contracts and in particular apprenticeship contracts leading to a diploma (high school certificate), university degree or master’s degree,³

¹ See Tissot, P. 2004. *Terminology of Vocational Training Policy*, Cedefop.

² Ibid., p. 25.

³ See the annex for the description of the organisation of the education and vocational training system in Italy.

known as higher-level apprenticeships, are intended to address the persistent weakness of young people in the Italian labour market.⁴

The unemployment rate for young people (population aged up to 25 years) in 2002, before the introduction of the policy shows that Italy was one of the countries with the worst performance in the European Union, with a rate (23.1 per cent) nearly nine points higher than the average for the EU15 (14.6 per cent). Only Greece and Spain had a weaker performance.

Table 1. Unemployment Rate of Population up to the Age of 25

Country	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
EU (27 countries)	17.9	18.0	18.4	18.3	17.1	15.3
EU (25 countries)	17.4	17.8	18.2	18.2	16.9	15.1
EU (15 countries)	14.6	15.3	15.9	16.3	15.7	14.7
Belgium	17.7	21.8	21.2	21.5	20.5	18.8
Bulgaria	37.0	28.2	25.8	22.3	19.5	15.1
Czech Republic	16.9	18.6	21.0	19.2	17.5	10.7
Denmark	7.4	9.2	8.2	8.6	7.7	7.9
Germany	9.1	9.8	11.9	14.2	12.8	11.1
Estonia	17.6	20.6	21.7	15.9	12.0	10.0
Ireland	8.5	9.1	8.9	8.6	8.7	9.1
Greece	26.8	26.8	26.9	26.0	25.2	22.9
Spain	24.2	24.6	23.9	19.7	17.9	18.2
France	19.3	19.1	20.4	21.0	22.1	19.4
Italy	23.1	23.7	23.5	24.0	21.6	20.3
Cyprus	8.1	8.9	10.5	13.0	10.5	10.0
Latvia	22.0	18.0	18.1	13.6	12.2	10.7
Lithuania	22.5	25.1	22.7	15.7	9.8	8.2
Luxembourg	7.0	11.2	16.4	14.3	15.8	15.3
Hungary	12.7	13.4	15.5	19.4	19.1	18.0
Malta	17.1	17.2	16.8	16.2	16.5	13.8

⁴ See Tiraboschi, M. 2006. "Young People and Employment in Italy: The (Difficult) Transition from Education and Training to the Labour Market", *International Journal of Comparative Labour Law and Industrial Relations* 22, No. 1.

Netherlands	5.0	6.3	8.0	8.2	6.6	5.9
Austria	6.7	8.1	9.4	10.3	9.1	8.7
Poland	42.5	41.9	39.6	36.9	29.8	21.7
Portugal	11.6	14.5	15.3	16.1	16.3	16.6
Romania	23.2	19.6	21.9	20.2	21.4	20.1
Slovenia	16.5	17.3	16.1	15.9	13.9	10.1
Slovakia	37.7	33.4	33.1	30.1	26.6	20.3
Finland	21.0	21.8	20.7	20.1	18.7	16.5
Sweden	11.9	13.4	16.3	21.7	21.5	19.1
United Kingdom	12.0	12.2	12.1	12.8	14.0	14.3
Croatia	35.4	35.8	33.2	32.3	28.9	24.0
Turkey	:	:	:	:	16.0	16.8
Norway	11.1	11.6	11.4	11.6	8.8	7.3
United States	12.0	12.4	11.8	11.3	10.5	10.5
Japan	9.9	10.1	9.5	8.7	8.0	7.7

Source: Eurostat – Labour Force Survey

Compared with the total unemployment rate in Italy in 2002 (8.6 per cent, only one percentage point higher than the EU15 rate at 7.6 per cent),⁵ the youth unemployment rate was 14.5 points higher. These figures show that the high youth unemployment level was not related to a difficult situation of the labour market and a low labour demand, but to a specific issue of this cohort.

Moreover, young people seem to be more affected by the rigidity of internal labour market as an obstacle to the access to the labour market.⁶

There was an evident need to tackle this problem, that seems to be related to different questions. On the one hand it results from the inefficiency of the education system, reflected in the unusually high average age at graduation, that in 2002 was 28 years,⁷ while according to EU regulations concerning state aid and employment incentives, young people are classified as such only up to

⁵ See Eurostat – Labour Force Survey.

⁶ See Freeman, R. B., and D. A. Wise, eds. 1992. *The Youth Labour Market Problem: Its Nature, Causes and Consequences*. Chicago: University of Chicago/NBER, and more recently, van der Velden, R. K. A, and M. H. J. Wolbers. 2003. “The integration of young people into the labour market: the role of training systems and labour market regulation”, *Transitions from Education to Work in Europe – The Integration of Youth into EU Labour Markets*, eds. Müller, W. and M. Gangl (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

⁷ See Almalaurea, *Condizione Occupazionale dei Laureati – Indagine 2003*. www.almalaurea.it.

the age of 25.⁸ On the other hand, it is due to the difficult transition from school, vocational training and higher education to work, that to some extent confirms the inefficiency of the Italian education and training system.

Another reason for the weakness of young people in the labour market is the mismatch between the skills, competences and knowledge provided by the education system and the vocational requirements of employers, who frequently complain that graduates lack suitable training and skills. Many university degree courses appear to be too general and do not give a specific knowledge providing access to a profession or responding to business needs. The European Council and the Commission⁹ underline the fact that in general the Italian higher education system runs programmes that tend not to reflect the needs of enterprises but above all the interests of the faculty members. As a result, many graduates work in a sector or context different from that of their degree, and this highlights the systematic lack of appropriate training and career guidance. There is a lack of employment services supporting young people and graduates seeking access to the labour market. In the debate on youth unemployment and precarious employment, there is clearly a need to consider the question of the school-to-work transition, finding ways to link teaching and training with work.

Furthermore, the level of youth unemployment seems to be affected also by the tendency of enterprises to hire adults rather than young people, since adults are more qualified and experienced, and have a higher level of productivity,¹⁰ while by definition young people need training that means additional costs. This shows the reluctance of companies to invest in vocational training and in human capital.

The difficult school-to-work transition and therefore the high average age at the entry into the labour market also has an impact on the perception of the precarious nature of employment. Whereas young people (up to the age of 25 years) tend not to be acutely aware of a lack of stability in employment, in the

⁸ This paradox is pointed out by O'Higgins, N. *The Challenges of Youth Unemployment*, cit. § 1.1.1., where he notes that, according to the definition used at a comparative level, the term "young people" is used to refer to those from 15 to 24 years of age, whereas in Italy the concept of "young person" has been extended, also for the purposes of the application of certain legal provisions, to include those up to the age of 32.

⁹ European Commission. 2005. *Joint Employment Report 2004/2005*. COM(2005)13. Brussels: European Commission.

¹⁰ See Caroleo F. E., and F. Pastore. 2006. "La disoccupazione giovanile in Italia", Scuola, Università, Mercato del lavoro dopo la riforma Biagi, eds. Gelmini, P., and M. Tiraboschi (Giuffrè, Milano) p. 50.

same conditions people over the age of 25 are likely to feel more precarious, due the need for greater stability and security relating to their private lives.

1.2. The Goals and Target Groups of the Policy

Higher-level apprenticeships are intended to some extent to address the issues described above, with young people as the target group. However, considering the difficulties for young people in entering the labour market, the policy is applied with reference to young people between the ages of 18 and 29, even though by EU standards those over the age of 25 no longer count as young people.

Designed as a market-oriented training instrument, the main goals of this policy are: earlier access by young people to the labour market, an enhancement of youth employability thanks to the connection between education and employment and, in particular, to the link between educational institutions and enterprises, an improvement of the school-to-work transition and, ultimately, the reduction of youth unemployment and an increase in youth employment.

With regard to the aim of reducing the age of access to the labour market, the reform of the Italian university system is essential.¹¹ With higher-level apprenticeships, the chance for apprentices to take a diploma, first-level degree or postgraduate degree while working means that they are already employed and active in the labour market.

It is evident that this means of access to the labour market represents a better form of transition from full-time education to employment.

The enhancement of youth employability is linked with the improvement of the skills and knowledge provided by courses. This objective is facilitated by the closer relationship between the educational institution and the working environment, in order for training to achieve the desired aim of providing individuals with the skills required by employers.

In relation to the European Employment Guidelines, it is important to highlight the aim at addressing the priority of improving employability in order to tackle youth unemployment and to prevent long-term unemployment

¹¹ The Italian university system was based on four-year degree programmes. The recent reform introduced a first-level degree courses with a duration of three years and second-level degree courses with a duration of two years. This new system has partly succeeded in reducing the age at graduation.

and in particular to “equip young people with the basic skills relevant to the labour market and needed to participate in lifelong learning”.¹²

1.3. The Legal and Financial Provisions to Implement the Policy

Under the terms of the apprenticeship contract, the apprentice has the duty to perform his/her work, while the employer is under a dual obligation. On one hand, he/she has to pay the employee (the apprenticeship) and on the other hand to provide training on the basis of specific training programmes for the purposes of acquiring vocational skills.

With reference to the apprenticeship contract, mention should be made of the fact that the State has exclusive legislative competence in relation to employment contracts, while the Regions have exclusive legislative competence in relation to vocational training.

Higher-level apprenticeships were introduced into the Italian system by Article 50, Legislative Decree No. 276, 23 September 2003. They provide for an apprenticeship contract leading to a diploma, a university or higher education qualification. This means that apprentices obtain the qualification specified in their individual training plan not only by means of off-the-job training (courses and lectures at a school, University or other higher education institution) and individual study, with a periodic appraisal, but also by means of on-the-job training and by the work itself.

It is important to underline the fact that the certificate awarded by the educational institution within an apprenticeship programme has the same form and value as a certificate awarded on completion of a standard school, university or higher education course.

Recently, Article 50, Legislative Decree No. 276, 23 September 2003 was amended by Article 23, paragraph 3, Law No. 133, 6 August 2008, that makes provision for apprenticeship contracts to be utilised also for doctoral research students.

With regard to the field of application of Article 50, this kind of apprenticeship contract can be offered to any young person between the ages of 18 and 29 (and 364 days) in all sectors of production.

Apprenticeships must be based on a written agreement, containing a description of the type of work to be carried out by the apprentice; the individual training plan (Piano formativo individuale); and the qualification

¹² See Council Decision of 18 February 2002 on Guidelines for Member States' Employment Policies for the year 2002, (2002/177/EC), I.

(diploma, first degree or higher degree qualification) to be awarded at the end of the apprenticeship. Moreover, it is forbidden to pay apprentices piecework and a dismissal before the end of the apprenticeship may be legitimately carried out only when there is a just cause or a just motive of a subjective or objective kind. At the end of the apprenticeship, the contract is turned into an open-ended employment contract except in the case of a dismissal pursuant to Article 2118, Civil Code.

The duration of apprenticeship contracts (related to the duration of education/training programmes) and the regulation of training programmes is delegated to the Regions. These matters are governed by agreements between the Region and trade unions, business organisations, universities and other higher education institutions.

The Region has the power to adopt legal provisions, but an agreement at territorial level is sufficient to regulate higher-level apprenticeships. However, Article 23, paragraph 4, Law No. 133, 6 August 2008, amended Article 50, paragraph 3, Legislative Decree No. 276, 23 September 2003, providing that in the absence of Regional regulation (even an agreement), higher-level apprenticeship programmes may be set up by agreement between employers and universities and other higher education institutions.

Article 53, Legislative Decree No. 276, 23 September 2003 regulates the job classification of apprentices on the basis of the employment grade laid down in the collective agreement. At the time of hiring, the employment grade of the apprentice can be two levels below the employment grade he/she will be assigned to at the end of the apprenticeship.

In cases in which the employer fails to implement the individual training plan, the company has to pay as a sanction the difference between the social security contributions paid and the contributions due corresponding to the remuneration of an employee in the higher employment grade that the apprentice would have been assigned to at the end of the apprenticeship, increased by 100%.

With reference to legal provisions at regional level, the tables below (Table 2 and Table 3) provide an overview of the state of the regulation and the implementation of higher-level apprenticeships.

Table 2. State of the Regulation and the Implementation of the Policy at Regional Level

State of the regulation and the implementation of the policy at regional level	Regions
Higher-level apprenticeships already provided prior to Legislative Decree No. 276, 23 September 2003	Trento, Bolzano (autonomous provinces)
Experimental implementation of higher-level apprenticeships	Lombardy, Piedmont, Veneto, Friuli Venezia Giulia, Liguria, Emilia Romagna, Tuscany, Umbria, Lazio
Legal regulation at regional level, but no experimental programmes	Apulia, Molise, Basilicata, Abruzzo
Lack of legal regulation and lack of experimental programmes	Marche, Calabria, Sicily, Sardinia

Table 3. Regional Regulations and Agreements

Regions	Regional regulations
Veneto	Regional Council Resolution No. 262/2004: Provisions for the implementation of higher-level apprenticeships also with regional funding Agreement between Region and social parties, 22.11.2004: The duration of the higher-level apprenticeship contract is linked to the duration of the higher-level apprenticeship training programme.
Piedmont	Regional Law No. 2/2007: General provisions for the implementation of higher-level apprenticeships. Regional Council Resolution No. 44-14478/2004: Specific provisions for the implementation of higher-level apprenticeships, with reference to first degree and master's degree courses
Trento (autonomous province)	Regional Law No. 6/2006: Provisions for aspects related to training. Higher-level apprenticeships in operation before Legislative Decree No. 276/2003
Bolzano (autonomous province)	Agreement between Region and social parties, 12.01.2007: Provision for a duration of the apprenticeship contract of three years
Friuli Venezia Giulia	Agreement between Region, Universities and social parties, 05.04.2006: Provisions for: the duration of higher-level apprenticeship training programme, 300/400 hours of off-the-job (school or higher education courses), company tutor training
Lombardy	Agreement between Region and social parties, 20.12.2005: Provision for a duration of higher-level apprenticeship contracts of 30 months
Tuscany	Regional Council Resolution No. 1217/2004: Approval of the agreement on experimental programmes of higher-level apprenticeships

	Regional Decree 538/2006: Provisions on experimental programmes
Liguria	Regional Council Resolution No. 834/2004: Approval of the agreement between the Region and the social partners on higher-level apprenticeships
Emilia Romagna	Regional Law No. 17/2005: General provisions for the implementation of higher-level apprenticeships Agreement between the Region and the social partners, 11.05.2005: Provision for the higher-level apprenticeship programmes
Marche	No provisions for higher-level apprenticeships
Lazio	Regional Law No. 9/2006: Provisions for aspects relating to training
Umbria	Regional Law No. 18/2007: General provisions for the implementation of higher-level apprenticeships
Basilicata	Regional Law No. 28/2006: Provisions for aspects relating to training
Apulia	No provisions for higher-level apprenticeships
Abruzzo	No legal provisions for higher-level apprenticeships
Molise	Regional Law No. 3/2008: General provisions for higher-level apprenticeships
Campania	No provisions for higher-level apprenticeships
Calabria	No provisions for higher-level apprenticeships
Sicily	No provisions for higher-level apprenticeships
Sardinia	No provisions for higher-level apprenticeships

Source: Own Elaboration

Concerning the financial provisions relating to this policy, in general economic incentives for apprenticeship contracts are applied. In particular (pursuant to Law No. 296/2007), the contributions for apprenticeship contracts amount to 10% of gross remuneration (for companies with up to nine apprentices, 8.5% in the first year, 7% in the second year and 10% in further years).

1.4. Institutional Arrangements and Procedures of Implementation

In order to set up higher-level apprenticeship schemes, as noted above, it is sufficient to conclude an agreement at territorial level between the Region, trade unions, business organisations and school, universities or other higher

education institutions, establishing the regulation and the duration of the training programmes.

In addition to this territorial agreement, the implementation of higher-level apprenticeship programmes requires an agreement between the school, the university or other higher education institutions and the employer intending to hire the apprentices.

With reference to the professional profile required by the company, the educational institution and the employer jointly define the vocational skills to be acquired by the apprentices at the end of the apprenticeship. Accordingly, the educational institution, with the help of the employer, has the task of designing a training programme responding to the needs of the company. Moreover, it is responsible for off-the-job training, for evaluating and certifying off-the-job (school, university and higher education institutions courses and lectures) and on-the-job training, and monitoring the acquisition of skills.

Concerning the selection of young people to enter the apprenticeship programme, it may be carried out in different ways and depends on the arrangement between the educational institution and the enterprise. The educational institutions can collect CVs and screen the applicants, and then let the enterprise choose the young people to be hired as apprentices. They can decide to carry out the selection and the interviews jointly. In other cases, the enterprise can organise the entire selection. Once the candidates have been selected, they are hired by the enterprise as apprentices.

The educational institution and the employer, and in particular the educational tutor and the company tutor, draft the individual training plan on the basis of a skills audit of the apprentice and the vocational skills required. The tutors are responsible for the achievement of the training objectives.

In general, the regional agreements or regulations specify the minimum duration of the contract and of the training programme in terms of the number of training hours. These include the allocation of time for: courses and lectures provided by the educational institution, formal training provided by the employer (including face-to-face teaching), individual study (including the time required for the drafting of the final research project, if required) and work.

In order to implement the experimental programmes, the Ministry of Labour and the Regions intending to set up higher-level apprenticeship programmes have concluded a number of agreements known as *Protocolli di intesa*. These agreements regulate not only the funding but also the way they are to be run.

Provision is made to set up specific courses for each group of apprentices, or to enrol individual apprentices on existing courses.

Specific higher-level apprenticeship courses can be set up with an individual company (with all the apprentices taking part employed by the same company) or with different companies in the same sector for training apprentices who need to acquire the same vocational skills. However, this type of course raises issues relating to the fact that the apprentices attend courses and lectures together, while companies in the same sector are in general competitors and are therefore concerned about the possible exchange of confidential information.

With regard to funding, national funds (based to a significant extent on ESF funds) were allocated by the Ministry to the Regions for the experimental programmes. The Regions issued a tender in order to select the higher-level apprenticeship programmes to be funded. In some cases, the employers co-financed the programmes.

Therefore, the cost of the experimental programmes was covered by State funding and to some extent by employer co-funding. In any case, the employer pays the labour cost (remuneration and other costs) for the apprentices.

2. The Results So Far

2.1. The Quantitative Results of the Policy So Far, in Relation to the Baseline Situation and to the Goals and Targets

According to Ministry of Labour figures, nine Regions (Piemonte, Lombardia, Veneto, Friuli Venezia Giulia, Liguria, Emilia Romagna, Toscana, Umbria, Lazio) and the autonomous Province of Bolzano have launched experimental programmes.¹³

All these higher-level apprenticeships programmes lead to a first degree or postgraduate qualification, and no programmes have been set up leading to a diploma.

The total number of projects activated amounts to 69, involving 1,005 apprentices.

¹³ The autonomous Province of Trento set up first-level degree programmes before the experimentation introduced by agreement between the Ministry of Labour and Regions. These programmes were funded entirely by the Province.

Table 4. Overview of the Academic Programmes Relating to the Experimentation on Higher-level Apprenticeships

Region	No. of projects set up	No. of activity	Participants
Piedmont	17	16 Master's degrees 1 Enrolment on a second-level University degree course	211
Lombardy	21	7 Enrolment on IFTS programme in a technical high school 2 Vocational Training Course for high-school graduates 12 Master's degrees	377
Province of Bolzano	3	2 First-level University degree courses (three year degree course)	68
Veneto	1	4 Master's degrees	49
Friuli Venezia Giulia	1	1 Master's degree	14
Liguria	7	6 Master's degrees 1 Enrolment on a IFTS programme	80
Emilia Romagna	5	4 Master's degrees Enrolment on another Master's programme	70
Tuscany	3	Enrolment on a Master's degree or a first-level degree course	26
Umbria	1	Enrolment on a Master's degree	5
Lazio	10	6 Master's degrees	105
Total	69		1,005

Source: Ministry of Labour and the Regions. Data elaborated by Isfol

The experimental programmes consist of 49 Master's degree programmes, seven IFTS¹⁴ programmes, two higher education courses for high-school graduates, two first-level degree courses (three-year degree programme) and

¹⁴ IFTS (Istruzione e Formazione Tecnica Superiore) courses are designed for young undergraduates and unemployed adults. The aim is to enable them to acquire vocational skills and abilities thanks to practical work experience programmes. IFTS courses may last from two to four semesters, from a minimum of 1200 hours to a maximum of 2440 hours. They can be adapted to the specific requirements of the apprentice.

the individual enrolment of apprentices on existing first-level degree, second-level degree or, Master's degree courses. With reference to the participants (see Table 5), the largest group of apprentices on the experimental programme is to be found in Lombardia, accounting for 37.4 per cent of the total, while the participants in the experimental programmes in Piemonte amount to 21.0 per cent. As a result, more than half the total (58.4 per cent) took part in apprenticeship programmes in these two Regions.

Table 5. Number of Participants on Experimental Apprenticeships by Region

Regions	Participants	Percentage
Lombardy	377	37.4
Piedmont	211	21.0
Lazio	105	10.4
Liguria	80	8.0
Emilia Romagna	70	7.0
Province of Bolzano	68	6.8
Veneto	49	4.9
Tuscany	26	2.6
Friuli Venezia Giulia	14	1.4
Umbria	5	0.5
Total	1,005	100.0

Source: *The Regions*. Data elaborated by Isfol

In comparing these figures with those concerning the residency of the apprentices (see Table 6), a certain amount of mobility is to be seen, since all the Italian regions are represented, while only the regions of central and northern Italy have set up apprenticeship programmes. Mobility from the south to the north has long been a trend in Italy both for educational and employment purposes.

Table 6. Region of Residency of Apprentices Taking Part in the Experimentation

Residency	No. of Apprentices	Residency	Apprentices
Piedmont	203	Marche	2
Val d'Aosta	1	Lazio	110
Lombardy	261	Abruzzo	3
Province of Bolzano	55	Molise	2
Province of Trento	5	Campania	31
Veneto	66	Apulia	27
Friuli Venezia Giulia	10	Basilicata	6
Liguria	52	Calabria	8
Emilia Romagna	61	Sicily	21
Tuscany	33	Sardinia	8
Umbria	9		

Not specified: 31

Source: *The Regions. Data elaborated by Isfol (regions listed in geographical order)*

Most of the apprentices (83.6 per cent) took part in first-level Master's (67.4 per cent) or second-level Master's degree programmes (16.2 per cent), while only 9.0 per cent of the apprentices were enrolled on first-level degree programmes, and 7.5 per cent on IFTS work placement schemes.

Table 7. Distribution of Apprentices by Type of Programme

Degree	Participants	Percentage
First-level Master's degree	677	67.4
Second-level Master's degree	163	16.2
University Degree	90	9.0
IFTS	75	7.5
Total	1,005	100.0

Source: *The Regions. Data elaborated by Isfol*

This distribution of apprentices among the different types of courses shows that most participants in the experimental programmes took Master's courses (49). Universities and employers seem to prefer programmes of this type, since they are shorter than first-degree courses (in general two years instead of three) and they are easier to set up. Another reason for this choice seems to be related to the vocational skills required. Employers prefer courses providing specific vocational knowledge, rather than a basic academic education, and in general Master's degree courses are more suited to achieving this objective.

In relation to the choice of either specific courses for groups of apprentices, or individual enrolment of apprentices on existing academic courses, the experimental programmes under examination consist mainly of courses specifically organised for groups of apprentices. In this way, actually, the educational institution and the employer can decide together when to hold lectures and examinations at the university, in such a way as to respond to the needs of the company.

On the other hand, individual enrolment of the apprentice on existing academic courses appears more appropriate when a specific vocational profile is required by a limited number of companies or just by one company and for this reason it is not possible to set up a specific higher-level apprenticeship programme. Only a small number of apprentices were enrolled on existing academic courses.

As regards the distribution of apprentices by gender, males outnumbered females (see Table 8 below).

Table 8. Distribution of Apprentices by Gender and Type of Higher Education Programme

Degree	M	F	Total
IFTS	57.3	42.7	100.0
First-level degree	87.8	12.2	100.0
First-level Master's degree	62.9	37.1	100.0
Second-level Master's degree	72.4	27.6	100.0
<i>Total</i>	<i>66.3</i>	<i>33.7</i>	<i>100.0</i>

Source: *The Regions. Data elaborated by Isfol*

The preponderance of young men taking part in the experimental programmes can be explained by the distribution of academic subjects among the participants. Table 9 shows that the largest group of apprentices consists of

engineering graduates and in general these degree courses are attended mainly by young men.¹⁵

Table 9. Distribution of the Apprentices Participating in Master's Degree Courses in Terms of their First Degree

Subject	No. Apprentices	Percentage	First-level Master	Second-level Master
Agriculture	4	0.7%	0.7%	0.6%
Architecture	27	4.5%	6.4%	0.6%
Chemistry/Pharmacy	8	1.3%	1.2%	1.8%
Economics/Statistical Sciences	80	13.5%	13.9%	11.7%
Biology	4	0.7%	0.7%	0.6%
Law	10	1.7%	2.2%	0.6%
Engineering	343	57.7%	52.2%	73.6%
Education Sciences	15	2.5%	3.7%	0.0%
Humanities	21	3.5%	5.0%	0.6%
Modern Languages	7	1.2%	1.5%	0.6%
Political Sciences	41	6.9%	8.2%	3.1%
Psychology	4	0.7%	1.0%	0.0%
Mathematics	30	5.1%	3.2%	6.1%
Total	594	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Not specified: 31

Source: *The Regions. Data elaborated by Isfol*

As to the distribution of the apprentices by age at the beginning of the programme, the 26 years age class was predominant (19.9 per cent), followed by the 27 and 28 years age class (respectively 14.4 and 14.1 per cent). This outcome reflects the prevalence of master's degree courses in the experimental

¹⁵ Also some first-level degree courses set up in the engineering subject area: for this reason male participants outnumber females.

higher-level apprenticeships. The younger age classes (19, 20, 21 years) were more strongly represented on the first-degree courses.

Table 10. Distribution of the Participants by Age at the Beginning of the Apprenticeship Programme and Standard Deviation in Relation to the Total Figure of the Participants and the Different Type of Training Programme

Age (years)	Total	IFTS	Degree	First-level Master's	Second-level Master's
19	4.8%	10.7%	33.3%	1.5%	-
20	3.2%	10.7%	18.9%	1.1%	-
21	2.3%	9.3%	14.4%	0.5%	-
22	1.8%	5.3%	11.1%	0.6%	-
23	4.1%	12.0%	6.7%	3.9%	-
24	8.1%	9.3%	5.6%	8.9%	6.1%
25	12.8%	5.3%	4.4%	13.8%	16.6%
26	19.9%	14.7%	3.3%	23.1%	18.4%
27	14.4%	5.3%	-	15.5%	22.1%
28	14.1%	6.7%	2.2%	15.9%	16.6%
29	9.9%	6.7%	-	10.7%	13.5%
30	4.5%	4.0%	-	4.7%	6.7%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Average Age	25.8	23.9	21.1	26.3	26.9
Standard Deviation	2.74	3.31	2.26	2.14	1.66

Not specified: 31

Source: *The Regions. Data elaborated by Isfol*

These figures reflect the well-known characteristics of the Italian labour market, that is to say the high average age of entry to the regular employment market by young people: the average age of the apprentices taking part in the experimental programmes is 25.6 years old.

Even considering the average age only of the apprentices enrolled on master's courses, the largest age class is 26 years, but in order to enrol on this master's course first-level degree is sufficient, so a 22 year-old could enrol on a master's programme. Clearly, the participants are quite old in relation to the programme, and the first impression is that those who enrol on apprenticeship programmes are graduates who encounter greater difficulty in finding employment. In a small number of cases (about five per cent), the participants graduated four, five or six years before starting their apprenticeships, but for the vast majority of participants this is not the case.

Table 11. Years since Graduation (First-level University Degree) at the Beginning of the Experimentation for all the Apprentices and for those Enrolled on Master's Programmes

Years since graduation	No. Apprentices	%	First-level Master	Second-level Master
0	167	28.3%	25.5%	35.6%
1	232	39.3%	38.6%	41.1%
2	106	17.9%	20.3%	11.7%
3	54	9.1%	10.0%	6.7%
4	22	3.7%	3.3%	4.9%
5	6	1.0%	1.4%	-
6	3	0.5%	0.7%	-
7	1	0.2%	0.2%	-
Total	591	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Average		1.3	1.4	1.0
Standard Deviation		1.20	1.23	1.09

Not specified: 282

Source: *The Regions. Data elaborated by Isfol*

The majority (67.6 per cent) of the apprentices participating in the experimental programme took their degree one year (39.3 per cent) or less (28.3 per cent) before starting the programme. It seems that the high average age of the apprentices participating in the experimental programmes

does not reflect the quality of the graduates, but rather reflects the high average age at graduation of Italian students in general.

With regard to the final grades of apprentices enrolled on the master's programmes, the average is 101.6/110, suggesting a high level of educational attainment by those taking part in the programme.

Table 12. Final Grades of Apprentices Enrolled on Master's Programmes

Disciplines	No. Apprentices	Average final grades
Agriculture	3	103.3
Architecture	27	105.0
Chemistry/Pharmacy	8	106.0
Economics/Statistical Sciences	79	101.9
Biology	4	104.3
Law	10	96.5
Engineering	321	100.5
Education Sciences	15	103.1
Humanities	20	105.5
Modern Languages	7	106.7
Political Sciences	40	103.5
Psychology	4	97.0
Mathematics	30	103.5
Total	568	101.6

Not specified: 290

Source: *The Regions*. Data elaborated by Isfol

As for the companies involved in the experimental programmes, a prevalence of large companies might be expected. However, all company sizes are represented and they are distributed fairly evenly. Only micro companies are under-represented. This is due also to the fact that in Italy small and medium-sized enterprises predominate.

However, as expected, the majority of apprentices were employed by large companies and the number decreases for medium-sized, small and micro companies. The average number of apprentices per company also decreases from large to micro enterprises and Table 13 shows that the average size is rather small.

These figures show that there are many companies employing just one apprentice, while on the other hand it is known that some higher-level apprenticeship programmes were set up specifically for a single company, employing all those attending the course (first degree or master's degree).

Table 13. Distribution of the Companies Involved in the Experimentation by Size and No. of Apprentices Employed by Each Company

Size	Enterprises	Percentage	No. Apprentices	Apprentices per enterprise
Micro	63	17.9%	83	1.3
Small	102	29.1%	130	1.3
Medium	88	25.1%	174	2.0
Large	98	27.9%	383	3.9
Total	351	100.0%	770	2.2

Not specified: (referring to the employees) 26

Source: *The Regions. Data elaborated by Isfol*

Moreover, observing the relation between company size and type of higher education programme, it is interesting to note, as expected, that the size of the companies increases as the level of the qualification increases. In other words, large companies participated most of all in second-level master's degree programmes and in first-level master's programmes, rather than in first-level degree programmes, and least of all in IFTS programmes. On the contrary, more than half the micro companies employed apprentices who attended IFTS programmes.

2.2. Other Results and Achievements of the Policy

Taking into consideration the figures for the experimental higher-level apprenticeship programmes, it is difficult to make a final assessment of the achievements of the policy. Evidence of the success of the policy in the integration of young people into the labour market is to be seen in the figures in Table 14. The great majority (70.9 per cent) of the participants are still employed in the same enterprise after the conclusion of the apprenticeship; 21.2 per cent are employed in another enterprise and 4.0 per cent are self-employed. Only about 4.0 per cent are unemployed or inactive.

Table 14. The Condition in the Labour Market of the Participants after the Conclusion of the Apprenticeship

Condition	No. Apprentices	Percentage
Employed in the same enterprise	107	70.9%
Employed in another enterprise	32	21.2%
Self-employed	6	4.0%
Unemployed	4	2.6%
Inactive (students, housewives, other)	2	1.35
Total	151	100.0%

Base: participants after the conclusion of the apprenticeship

Source: *Isfol*

Although the experimental programmes appear to be successful, it must be underlined that the number of experimental programmes and the apprentices taking part were limited in relation to the overall size of Italian labour market. However, the advantages for all parties involved in the higher-level apprenticeship programmes are clear. Apprentices have the chance to work and at the same time to continue their education with courses based on specific vocational training, with a view to acquiring particular skills and competences and, in the end, a higher-level education qualification. These higher-level apprenticeship programmes promote earlier access by young people to the labour market, in this way addressing the problem of the high age of entry to the labour market in Italy among graduates.

With these programmes, the employer has the chance to participate, together with the educational institutions, in the design of courses responding to the company's vocational requirements, and to plan training programmes enabling apprentices to acquire key skills and knowledge.

By working together with employers in planning higher-level apprenticeship programmes, school and higher educational institutions can gain a better understanding of the vocational skills, abilities and competences required by the labour market. The information acquired can enable them to update existing courses, in particular at the university level, in order to improve the education and vocational knowledge of graduates and thus facilitate their employability in the school-to-work transition.

As to the results of the policy in relation to the European Employment Guideline objectives, higher-level apprenticeships were introduced in the Italian legal system in 2003 and addressed the priority of the European Employment Guidelines for 2002 (that were in force when it was designed) of improving employability. The aim was to tackle youth unemployment and to prevent long-term unemployment and in particular to “equip young people with the basic skills relevant to the labour market and needed to participate in lifelong learning”.¹⁶

However, higher-level apprenticeships are clearly an appropriate policy instrument to achieve the objectives of the Guidelines for the employment policies adopted in the following years. These apprenticeships are an excellent way “to build employment pathways for young people” as required by the employment guidelines for 2005-2008,¹⁷ confirming the need to reduce youth unemployment. Higher-level apprenticeships also respond to guideline No. 23 Expand and improve investment in human capital, calling for “inclusive education and training policies and action to facilitate significantly access to initial vocational, secondary and higher education, including apprenticeships and entrepreneurship training” and the improvement of educational attainment levels and equipping young people with the necessary key competences, in line with the European Youth Pact.¹⁸

¹⁶ See Council Decision of 18 February 2002 on Guidelines for Member States' Employment Policies for the year 2002, (2002/177/EC), I.

¹⁷ See Council Decision of 12 July 2005 on Guidelines for the Employment Policies of the Member States, (2005/600/EC).

¹⁸ See European Youth Pact, in Annex 1 of Presidency Conclusions of the European Council, Brussels, 22 and 23 March 2005, (7619/05).

Basically, these objectives are confirmed in the new Integrated Guidelines for Growth and Jobs for 2008-2010,¹⁹ in particular guideline No. 18 Promote a lifecycle approach to work through, and guideline No. 23 Expand and improve investment in human capital. As a result, higher-level apprenticeships continue to be an effective policy instrument in order to achieve these goals.

2.3. An Assessment of the Obstacles and Constraints Encountered

Mention should be made of the fact that higher-level apprenticeships encountered several obstacles during implementation and experimentation.

First of all it is necessary to underline the lack of “cultural” preparation on the part of all parties (Regions, social partners, higher educational institution) involved, with reference to the design and implementation of the policy and the courses. As already noted, the majority of the experimental programmes were master’s degree courses that are considerably easier to organise than degree courses or high school courses.

After the entry into force of Legislative Decree No. 276, 23 September 2003 regulating apprenticeship contracts leading to the award of a diploma, first degree or postgraduate qualification, the Regions had to deal with the regulation of higher-level apprenticeships on the basis of agreement with trade unions, business organisations, universities and other higher educational institutions.

However, the Regions have reacted slowly in terms of the adoption of legal provisions and the conclusion of agreement with the parties involved. This led to a delay in the experimentation of the policy.

At the time of writing, the application of this policy instrument and its regulation are incomplete and uncertain: some Regions have not adopted any provisions, or have not moved beyond the framework regulations. In some cases, the agreements with the parties involved have expired or concern only the experimentation and do not provide a stable organisation of higher-level apprenticeship programmes. This situation gives rise to uncertainty at the level of application, for companies and higher educational institutions that intend to set up new programmes outside and beyond the experimentation, funded by companies themselves.

The social partners have participated in the agreements at regional level in regulating the policy and the experimentation. In some Regions (Veneto,

¹⁹ See Communication from the Commission to the Spring European Council – Integrated Guidelines for Growth and Jobs (2008-2010), COM(2007)803, Brussels, 11 December 2007.

Emilia Romagna, Lombardia) they have also concluded regional collective agreements on higher-level apprenticeships, regulating for example the duration (in some cases a minimum of 24 months, in other cases a maximum of 30 months).

However, the social partners do not seem to have fully understood the potential of this policy. In some cases, they make no provision for higher-level apprenticeships in the collective agreement, preferring to use the apprenticeships for acquiring specific vocational qualifications (*apprendistato professionalizzante*).

Another constraint that should be mentioned concerns the administrative aspect of the experimental higher-level apprenticeships. It should be underlined that the task of financial monitoring and reporting was onerous in terms of time spent within the overall programme. This monitoring was necessary due to public funding, but it could be organised in a less onerous manner.

In spite of the difficulties mentioned, in some cases higher-level apprenticeships have been adopted as standard practice. In the autonomous Province of Bolzano, the first-level degree course continues beyond the experimentation thanks to an agreement at provincial level and funding by employers and the university, without any public financial support. In Emilia Romagna, a master's degree course has been set up on the basis of an agreement between the employer and the university involved and is completely financed by the company employing the apprentices.

3. The Policy Debate

In Italy there is only a limited debate on higher-level apprenticeships, although such a debate would be useful in order to better understand the functioning of the policy and its potential not only in terms of advantages for young people, but also for enterprises and the economy as a whole (in terms of improved school-to-work transition and lower youth unemployment).

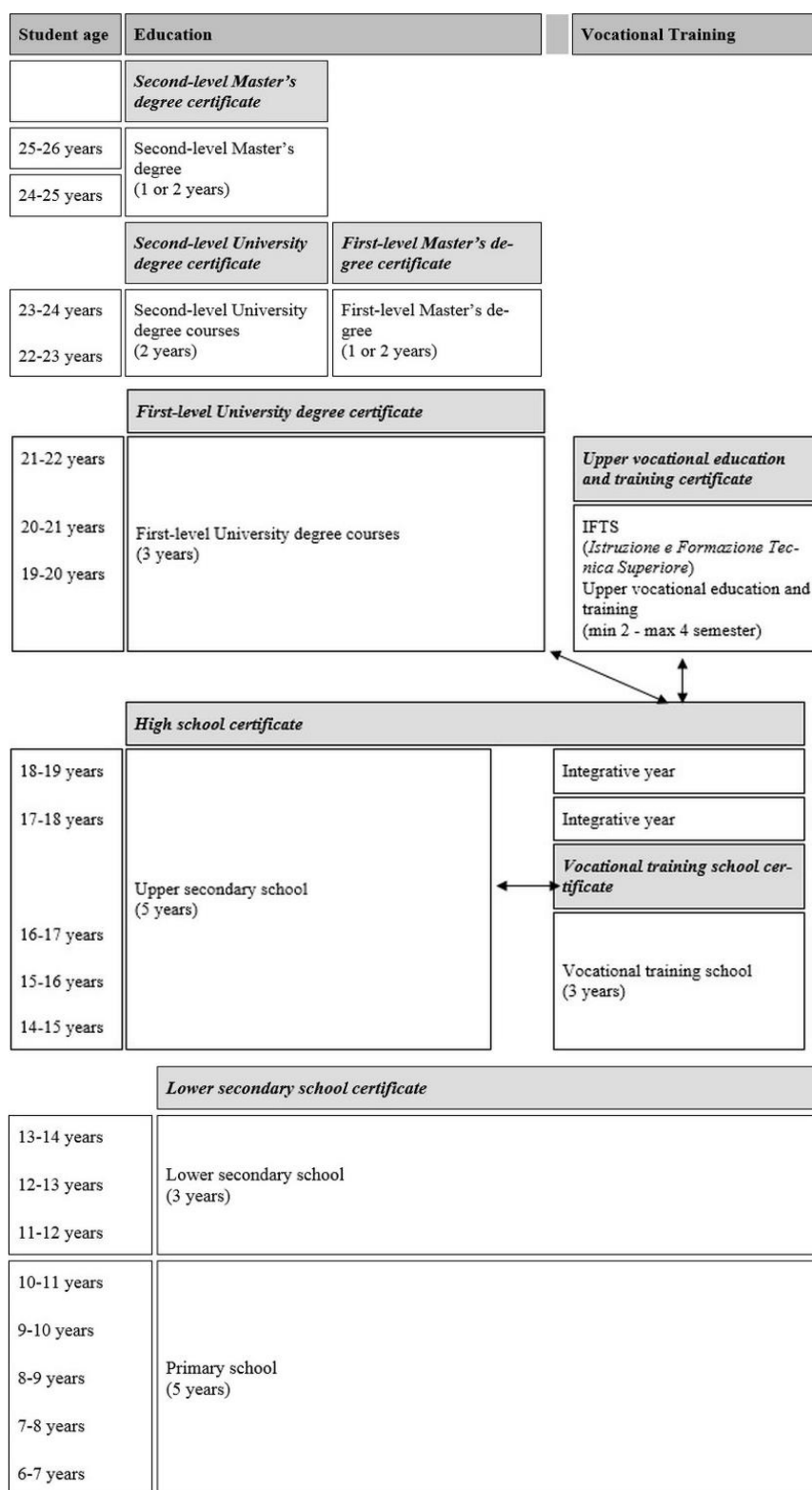
However, the results of experimentation and the obstacles described above have led to an amendment to the law regulating higher-level apprenticeships. In fact, in relation to the difficulties of implementing higher-level apprenticeships due mainly to the absence of regional regulations, Article 50, paragraph 3, Legislative Decree No. 276, 23 September 2003, was recently amended by Article 23, paragraph 4, Law No. 133, 6 August 2008, providing that in the absence of Regional regulation (even a territorial agreement among

the parties), higher-level apprenticeship programmes may be set up by agreement between employers and universities and other education institutions.

Thus, higher-level apprenticeships can now be set up all over Italy, either through regional regulations or by means of an agreement between an employer and an educational institution (school, university, higher educational institution), interested in setting up a higher-level apprenticeship programme.

The new regulation should therefore result in a better and more effective implementation of the policy, thanks to the essential provisions for it to operate. Nevertheless, the success of the higher-level apprenticeship in achieving its goal is linked also to the flexibility and adaptability of the regulation. These are key elements for drafting programmes and courses developing the skills and competences required by companies and leading to the award of educational qualifications.

Fig. 1. Education and Vocational Training in Italy



Source: Own Elaboration