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(Resolutions, recommendations and opinions)

RECOMMENDATIONS

COUNCIL

COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION

of 15 March 2018

on a European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships

(2018/C 153/01)

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

Having regard to the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, and in particular Article 166(4) and Article 292, in conjunction with Article 153(2) and Article 153(1) point (b), 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. They are part of the formal vocational education and training (VET) systems and they exist in parallel to other work-based learning and/or vocational pathways.
- (2) Well-designed apprenticeship schemes benefit both employers and learners as well as reinforce the link between the world of work and the world of education and training. High quality standards avoid that apprenticeships are geared towards low-skilled jobs and poor training that damage their reputation. In addition to providing a pathway to excellence, quality apprenticeships can also contribute to fostering active citizenship and social inclusion by integrating people of different social and personal backgrounds 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 institutions, 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) In order to ensure an even deeper and broader involvement of stakeholders, the Commission organised hearings at two stages, on 30 March and 7 June 2017, with European cross-industry and sectoral social partners, and the chambers of commerce, industry and crafts.

- (6) The European Qualifications Framework (EQF) first established in 2008 and revised in 2017 ⁽¹⁾, improves the transparency, comparability and portability of citizens' qualifications, including apprentices.
- (7) The Council Recommendation of 18 June 2009 on a European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET) ⁽²⁾ established a reference instrument to help Member States promote and monitor continuous improvement of their vocational education and training systems.
- (8) 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.
- (9) The Council Recommendation of 22 April 2013 on establishing a Youth Guarantee ⁽³⁾ 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.
- (10) The European social partners, the European Commission and the Lithuanian Presidency of 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.
- (11) 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.
- (12) The Council Recommendation on a Quality Framework for Traineeships ⁽⁴⁾ adopted on 10 March 2014 established a number of principles to improve the quality of traineeships outside formal education and training.
- (13) Under the Copenhagen process for European cooperation on vocational education and training, 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.
- (14) 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.
- (15) 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.
- (16) Regulation (EU) 2016/589 of the European Parliament and of the Council ⁽⁵⁾ stipulates that apprenticeships based on an employment contract can be advertised on EURES — The European job mobility portal as of May 2018.
- (17) 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.
- (18) The Commission Communication Investing in Europe's Youth from 7 December 2016 ⁽⁶⁾, 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.
- (19) 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.

⁽¹⁾ OJ C 189, 15.6.2017, p. 15.

⁽²⁾ OJ C 155, 8.7.2009, p. 1.

⁽³⁾ OJ C 120, 26.4.2013, p. 1.

⁽⁴⁾ OJ C 88, 27.3.2014, p. 1.

⁽⁵⁾ OJ L 107, 22.4.2016, p. 1.

⁽⁶⁾ COM(2016) 940 final.

- (20) The European Pillar of Social Rights proclaimed on 17 November 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.
- (21) 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.
- (22) 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.
- (23) 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.
- (24) 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.
- (25) 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.
- (26) 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.
- (27) 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 and traditions of vocational education and training systems and policy priorities in the various Member States.
- (28) This Recommendation does not affect the competences of the Member States to maintain or establish more advanced provisions for apprenticeships than the ones recommended here, nor to maintain or develop other forms of work-based learning and/or vocational education and training outside the scope of the Recommendation and to apply to them, in full or in part, the criteria set out below.

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.

For the purposes of this Recommendation and without prejudice to national terminology, apprenticeships are understood as formal vocational education and training schemes that

- a) combine learning in education or training institutions with substantial work-based learning in companies and other workplaces,
- b) lead to nationally recognised qualifications,
- c) are based on an agreement defining the rights and obligations of the apprentice, the employer and, where appropriate, the vocational education and training institution, and
- d) with the apprentice being paid or otherwise compensated for the workbased component.

Criteria for learning and working conditions

Written agreement

1. Before the start of the apprenticeship a written agreement should be concluded to define the rights and obligations of the apprentice, the employer, and where appropriate the vocational education and training institution, related to learning and working conditions.

Learning outcomes

2. The delivery of a set of comprehensive learning outcomes defined in accordance with national legislation should be agreed by the employers and vocational education and training institutions and, where appropriate, trade unions. This should ensure a balance between job-specific skills, knowledge and key competences for lifelong learning 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 institutions and teachers to provide guidance to apprentices and to ensure mutual and regular feed-back. Teachers, trainers and mentors, specially in micro-, small and medium-sized companies, should be supported to update their skills, knowledge 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 apprenticeship, meaning at least half of it, should be carried out in the workplace with, where possible, the opportunity to undertake a part of the workplace experience abroad. Taking into account the diversity of national schemes, the aim is to progress gradually towards that share of the apprenticeship being workplace learning.

Pay and/or compensation

5. Apprentices should be paid or otherwise compensated, in line with national or sectoral requirements or collective agreements where they exist, and taking into account arrangements on cost-sharing between employers 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 and/or other quality assurance measures.

Involvement of social partners

9. Social partners, including, where relevant, at sectoral level and/or intermediary bodies, 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 envisaged, particularly for micro-, small and medium-sized companies, enabling cost-effective apprenticeships for companies, taking into account, when appropriate, cost-sharing arrangements between employers and public authorities.

Flexible pathways and mobility

11. To facilitate access, entry requirements for apprenticeships should take into account relevant informal and non-formal learning and/or, if relevant, the accomplishment of preparatory programs. Qualifications acquired through apprenticeships should be included in nationally recognised qualification frameworks referenced to the European Qualifications Framework ⁽¹⁾. Apprenticeships should allow access to other learning opportunities, including at higher education and training levels, career pathways and/or, where relevant, the accumulation of units of learning outcomes. Transnational mobility of apprentices, either at the workplace or education and training institutions, should be progressively promoted as a component of apprenticeship qualifications.

Career guidance and awareness raising

12. Career guidance, mentoring and learner support should be provided before and during the apprenticeship to ensure successful outcomes, to prevent and reduce drop-outs as well as support those learners to reengage into relevant education and training pathways. Apprenticeships should be promoted as an attractive learning pathway through widely targeted awareness-raising activities.

Transparency

13. The transparency of, and access to apprenticeship offers within and between Member States should be ensured, including with the support of public and private employment services as well as other relevant bodies, and, when appropriate, by using Union tools such as EURES as provided for in the EURES regulation.

Quality assurance and tracking of apprentices

14. Quality assurance approaches should be in place taking into account the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET) ⁽²⁾, including a process allowing a valid and reliable assessment of the learning outcomes. The tracking of employment and career progression of the apprentices should be pursued, in accordance with national and European legislation on data protection.

Implementation at national level

Within the scope of this Recommendation, for its implementation 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. Ensure equal access, promote gender balance and tackle discrimination in apprenticeship schemes;
17. Include the relevant implementing measures in the National Reform Programmes under the European Semester;
18. 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

19. 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 should include the further training needs of VET teachers and trainers regarding digital innovations in apprenticeships.

Awareness-raising

20. Promoting the excellence and attractiveness of apprenticeships, as well as a positive image among young people, their families and employers, through awareness raising campaigns such as the European Vocational Skills Week;

⁽¹⁾ OJ C 189, 15.6.2017, p. 15.

⁽²⁾ OJ C 155, 8.7.2009, p. 1.

Funding

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

Follow-up

22. Monitoring the implementation of this Recommendation with the support of the tripartite Advisory Committee on Vocational Training, building on the existing monitoring instruments used in the framework of the European Semester;
 23. Reporting to the Council on the implementation of the Framework within three years from the date of its adoption.
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