

## **SME apprentice providers = win : win scenario**

A EUROCHAMBRES conference today on engaging small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) in vocational education and training (VET) highlighted not only the economic and social benefits of apprenticeships for smaller companies, but also the obstacles. In the presence of Education and Culture Commissioner, Androulla Vassiliou, Chambers set out key recommendations for increasing the involvement of SMEs in apprenticeship schemes and pressed for stronger EU level actions to promote VET in the new legislative term.

### **Why should we engage SMEs in apprenticeship schemes?**

SMEs are the main source of employment, job creation and growth. They are the lifeblood of Europe's economic recovery and need skilled staff in order to fulfil this role. However, finding such skilled staff is harder for smaller businesses with tight margins and limited resources. Apprenticeship schemes represent a valuable way of sourcing skilled staff, yet relatively few SMEs across the EU reap the benefits of apprenticeships due to the many administrative and financial barriers they encounter.

EUROCHAMBRES' President, Richard Weber, the owner of a medium sized company, explained: *"The vast majority of the 20 million plus SMEs in the EU are not involved in apprenticeship schemes. This is a missed opportunity for the individual businesses and in tackling youth unemployment."*

### **How should we engage SMEs in apprenticeship schemes?**

Effective measures are required across the EU to increase the participation of SMEs in apprenticeship schemes. EUROCHAMBRES set out a series of such measures in a brochure presented at the conference, including:

- A share of the financial burden between the host company and the state;
- Local VET contact points – such as Chambers - that provide administrative and practical support to SMEs;
- Communication campaigns to promote apprenticeships both to young people and to SMEs.

According to Martha Schultz, EUROCHAMBRES' Deputy President and entrepreneur from the tourism and services sector: *"Many SMEs are willing to offer apprenticeships but without external support may be unable to do so. Such support is cost-effective given the economic and social benefits that a skilled workforce brings a business and the economy as a whole."*

EUROCHAMBRES argues that EU level efforts to promote apprenticeships and other forms of vocational education and training need to be increased from the start of the new legislative term. The association recommends in particular dedicating a flagship initiative within the revised Europe 2020 Strategy to the area of VET and backing this up with adequate resources.

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