



Position Paper

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European framework for quality and effective apprenticeships

In summary, EUROCHAMBRES:

- Welcomes the priority given to apprenticeships, as a key tool to reduce skills mismatch and increase youth employability
- Considers the proposed framework for apprenticeships as a positive step to step up reforms and to speed up effective delivery of quality and effective apprenticeships in Europe
- Welcomes the balance between quality for apprentices and cost-effectiveness for companies
- Regrets that a multi-stakeholder approach has not been promoted
- Rejects the suggestion from some quarters that greater quantity of apprenticeships should not be pursued in parallel to enhanced quality and thus reiterates its call for a quantitative target on work-based learning at EU level
- Stresses that specific support for SMEs to host apprenticeships is needed
- Emphasises that more efforts are needed to enhance apprenticeship attractiveness

Introduction

EUROCHAMBRES – The Association of European Chambers of Commerce and Industry represents over 20 million enterprises in Europe – 98% of which are SMEs – through members in 43 countries and a European network of 1700 regional and local Chambers.

Chambers of Commerce and Industry play a hybrid role in apprenticeship as both, business representatives and vocational education and training providers. As business representatives, Chambers play an important role in encouraging companies, in particular SMEs, to host apprentices and to cooperate with the education world as well as in working with the national authorities to improve a regulatory environment more conducive to quality and effective apprenticeships development.

Chambers are also active players in the development and delivery of education and training policies. 80% of all Chambers of Commerce and Industry are involved in education and training and 48% of all Chambers deliver initial or continuous vocational education and training. Every year, nearly 1.8 million people receive training qualifications via the Chamber network. The involvement of Chambers in apprenticeship systems varies according to the national prerequisites. Chambers play a key role in the delivery, management and governance of apprenticeship schemes in many EU Member States. Every year, 600.000 apprenticeships are managed directly by Chambers, mainly in Austria, France, Germany, Hungary, Luxembourg and Spain.

EUROCHAMBRES mainly welcomes the EC proposal for a Council Recommendation on a European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships COM (2017) 563 adopted on 5 October 2017, which was announced in both, the New Skills Agenda for Europe in June 2016 and the EC “Investing in Europe’s youth” initiative in December 2016. However, some improvements in particular regarding the governance would guarantee a greater impact of this new initiative. Specific comments can be found on the following pages.

Quality and effective apprenticeships: a priority to tackle youth unemployment and skills mismatch

While unemployment rates are falling, 18.4 million of people are still unemployed, including 3.7 million of young people. At the same time, 40% of employers in Europe reported difficulties in finding employees with the required skills. The lack of skilled workers is considered as the second main challenge for entrepreneurs in 2018 according to EUROCHAMBRES last Economic Survey. EUROCHAMBRES has promoted for years the key role played by apprenticeships in easing the transition from school to work. Apprenticeships are recognised to help young people to acquire the knowledge, skills and experience needed by the labour market, thus increasing youth employability and reducing the skills mismatch. Countries where apprenticeships are strong and solid (Germany and Austria) also show some of the lowest youth unemployment rates in Europe. EUROCHAMBRES has called for further measures at EU level to implement robust apprenticeship schemes across the Member States. EUROCHAMBRES is part of the Pact for Youth project led by CSR Europe, which aims at boosting youth employability and inclusion in particular through the creation of at least 100,000 new good quality apprenticeships, traineeships or entry-level jobs during the two years of the implementation of the project.

EUROCHAMBRES considers that the EC proposal on the European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships is a positive step to differentiate between apprenticeship and other forms of work-based learning as well as to step up reforms in providing guidance to Member States lagging behind in this area and to speed up the effective delivery of quality and effective apprenticeships in Europe.

Balance between quality for learners and cost-effectiveness for employers welcomed - criterion on workplace component crucial

The 14 criteria set in the EC proposal address many of the key components to ensure that apprenticeship schemes benefit both, employers and apprentices in a win-win situation. The dual purpose of apprenticeship set in the European Commission proposal – “quality” and “effectiveness” - is central for a successful development and implementation of apprenticeship schemes. EUROCHAMBRES therefore welcomes the balance between quality for learners and cost-effectiveness for employers and stresses the importance that the criteria as well as their balance are retained unchanged when it comes to the upcoming negotiations in the Council.

The cost-effectiveness of the apprenticeship schemes will make them more attractive for companies and more accessible in particular for SMEs. In this respect, EUROCHAMBRES welcomes in particular the very important quantitative target defined in the criterion on the workplace component, which sets that at least half of the apprenticeship duration should be carried out in a workplace.

While companies gain benefit from hosting apprentices both, in terms of the tasks performed by the apprentices during the apprenticeships and in identifying potential new employees with an awareness of the reality of the job and a better match of skills and jobs they offer, training apprentices requires a return on investment in order to make an extra investment (financial, organizational and human).

For an employer to host an apprentice, they need the programme to have low bureaucracy, easy access to relevant information, good cooperation with the VET providers, a right set of incentives such as employer involvement in the design of curricula and “train the trainer” schemes, as well as motivated and well-

educated apprentices with solid learning base of knowledge, skills and competences prior to start apprenticeships. A clear and appropriate regulatory framework at national / regional level is recognized as a prerequisite for an employer to host an apprenticeship.

A multi-stakeholder approach should be privileged

Only a strong partnership of all the key actors involved in the apprenticeship training system – the role of these actors vary from a country to another – will have a positive effect on the supply, quality and attractiveness of apprenticeships. While social partners are certainly important actors in the field of education and training, they are not the only ones. EUROCHAMBRES regrets that the European Commission only emphasised their role and did not encourage a broader partnership approach to deliver, manage and govern quality and effective apprenticeship schemes. Chambers play a key role in apprenticeship training and will be a key partner in the implementation of the framework.

Quantity of apprenticeships to be increased in parallel to their quality

To have a real impact on youth employability, EUROCHAMBRES has always closely linked quantity and quality in apprenticeship. However, EUROCHAMBRES considers that the EC proposal should have been more ambitious. To have a real impact, the Council Recommendation should propose a EU level target for work-based learning within VET- 50% of vocational training students should have access to work-based learning, the current figure being only just over 25%. EUROCHAMBRES has pushed for such a target for years. Despite strong reform efforts in many countries, apprenticeships are still considered too often as an education pathway of second choice for the young people and their parents and are not equally developed around Europe. Such a target would encourage the EU Member States with a low number of young people in apprenticeship training to increase their involvement.

SMEs needs specific support to be involved in quality and effective apprenticeships

EUROCHAMBRES welcomes that one of the 14 criteria for quality and effective apprenticeship is to support companies. SMEs do not have the same human and financial resources and cannot promise the same development opportunities for apprentices as large companies. However, their engagement in apprenticeship will be key if we want to increase the supply of apprenticeships. Appropriate support structures and measures (both financial and non-financial) have to be developed to support companies, in particular SMEs, in the provision of apprenticeships to ensure their cost-effectiveness.

Chambers can play a key role in supporting the involvement of SMEs in apprenticeship training. They can among other activities: raise awareness among businesses about benefits of hosting apprentices and inform them about the functioning of apprenticeship schemes and related WBL; recruit and accredit new businesses; identify, select and train the in-company trainers; help SMEs to select suitable apprentices / trainees; provide legal and practical assistance regarding the training contract; communicate curricula content and desired learning outcomes to the trainers; assist SMEs to administer exams; provide a contact point for apprentices, schools and businesses in order to prevent conflict and enhance communication. In this context, specific support to reinforce the capacity of intermediary organisations such as Chambers should be further developed.

It will be crucial to accompany the proposed framework for apprenticeships by earmarking funding in ERASMUS+ as well as in the context of the on-going discussions on the EU programme on education and training after 2020. Involving more apprentices in ERASMUS+ will contribute to increase the attractiveness of apprenticeship training and the attractiveness of VET overall.

More effort needed to enhance apprenticeship attractiveness

EUROCHAMBRES welcomes the emphasis given to enhance apprenticeship attractiveness among both, learners and companies. Chambers constantly face the challenge of making VET and apprenticeship more visible. EUROCHAMBRES believes that the European Vocational Skills Week should be accompanied by a EU-wide communication campaign implemented at national and local level to reach out stakeholders, who are unconvinced or not involved yet.

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