

European Conference

Advice on apprenticeship and traineeship schemes with ESF support

Conference Concept Note

The Conference marks an important milestone in the roadmap towards establishing the European Alliance for Apprenticeships. This highly interactive event will provide information and working sessions on apprenticeship and traineeship schemes throughout the EU, including a consideration of how European funding can be used to develop new schemes or improve existing ones. It will also provide an opportunity to refine commitments of actions and pledges from key stakeholders.

The conference will be hosted by László Andor, Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, and forms part of the project entitled 'Providing targeted advice on ESF support to apprenticeship and traineeship schemes', financed by ESF Technical Assistance, European Commission, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion.

When?

5-6 June 2013

Where?

Brussels, Bedford Hotel & Congress Centre, 135-137 Rue du Midi

For whom?

The event will bring together key actors from across the EU responsible for planning, setting up new and managing existing apprenticeship and traineeship schemes. Over 160 delegates comprising of national authorities in the Member States, in particular those in charge of employment and education policies, and those managing ESF, relevant national and regional agencies, as well as social partners, youth representatives and employment services will attend the event. They will present illustrative practices as well as new developments in the field of apprenticeship and traineeship schemes.

Aims and objectives:

This event will provide a forum for the presentation and discussion of:

- (1) national/regional/ESF funded apprenticeship and traineeship programmes, the lessons learnt and eventual results/outcomes;
- (2) the need for technical assistance in Member States where such programmes have been launched or are planned;
- (3) Commission support for the Member States through ESF Technical Assistance and related measures and tools (e.g. Helpdesk, shared workspace, etc.);
- (4) which Member States are ready for more in-depth cooperation in this area.

In addition to the above the event will create an excellent opportunity for networking and establish a sustainable network of partner and stakeholder organisations.

Benefits:

- learn from good practices demonstrated across the EU
- utilise an opportunity to disseminate the results of successful apprenticeship and traineeship programmes
- meet your peers and share what works and what doesn't and identify synergies and ways of working together to help in your future work
- meet and network with relevant stakeholders in the field
- be part of a key EU policy development and feed into concrete recommendations for action

The event will offer a programme of activities allowing open dialogue, constructive critique and self-reflection. It will include the following key elements:

Plenary sessions

- Presentations by European Commission representatives highlighting **EU policies and priorities to support youth transition to the labour market**, including information on key Commission's initiatives such as the Youth Guarantee, European Alliance for Apprenticeships and Quality Framework for Traineeships. Examples of how ESF funding could be used for apprenticeships and traineeships will also be presented.
- Presentations by policy experts on the **current state of play: research, and policy options**, providing an overview of apprenticeships and traineeships across the EU, and highlighting key success factors, the main challenges, and opportunities to overcome them.
- Introductory presentations on the **'Providing targeted advice on ESF support to apprenticeship and traineeship schemes' project**, explaining its objectives and support package available, including the Helpdesk service.

Thematic working forums

Parallel working forums will enable direct interactions among participants. The main aim of the debate is to identify common challenges and major barriers, share examples of interesting practice and develop practical solutions in planning and setting up new as well as managing and evaluating existing apprenticeship and traineeship schemes. Within each workshop, there will be an opportunity to explore technical assistance needs in overcoming the challenges and barriers, linked to the particular theme of each group:

- 'Traineeships: key challenges and good practices'
- 'Apprenticeships: key challenges and good practices?'
- 'Involvement of key actors (social partners, employers...) in traineeship and apprenticeship schemes'
- 'Sources of financing and financing models for apprenticeships/traineeships'
- 'Quality Assurance of Apprenticeships and Traineeships'
- 'Changing mind-sets towards apprenticeships – how can they be made more attractive?'

'Summing up' sessions will be bringing delegates together to summarise the outcomes of the debate in thematic working forums; rapporteurs from each group will briefly summarise the workshop discussions and highlight the key issues and potential solutions as well as examples of transferable practice.

'Key lessons and way forward'

This session will offer a facilitated debate and reflections on the key messages emerging from the conference.

Advisory sessions (by individual appointment)

An opportunity for Member States to receive tailored advice from high level policy and European Commission representatives with regards to setting up new and managing existing apprenticeship and traineeship schemes. Dedicated *'Info points'* will be set up in the plenary and breakout rooms at which consultations will take place.

Background

Young people in most EU Member States have been hit disproportionately hard by the recession and its aftermath, although there are variations between countries. The youth unemployment rate in EU27 rose from 15% in February 2008 to 23.5% in March 2013. This represents a historic high and means that over 5.6 million young Europeans are unemployed, over twice as high as adult unemployment rates. The overall figures however mask significant diversity in the situation across the Member States: youth unemployment ranges, in March 2013, from Greece (59.1%)¹ and Spain (55.9%), to Germany and Austria (both 7.6%), and the Netherlands (10.5%).²

Also, 7.5 million young people across the EU are neither in employment, nor education and training (so called NEETs).

In response, in its Europe 2020 strategy launched in 2010, the EU has explicitly recognised youth unemployment as a problem at the highest political level.

In September 2010, the flagship initiative "**Youth on the Move**" (YoM)³, adopted in the framework of the Europe 2020 Strategy, aims at enhancing the performance of education systems and facilitating the entry of young people into the labour market. Besides actions that aim to make education and training more tailored to the needs of Europe's youth, it includes for the first time a policy framework to improve youth employment.

In December 2011, the Commission adopted the **Youth Opportunities Initiative (YOI)** proposing stronger cooperation with Member States for the delivery of action tackling the very high youth unemployment rates with considerable ESF support.⁴

More recently, in December 2012, the European Commission adopted the **Youth Employment Package (YEP)**⁵ which again emphasises the need for urgent action at both EU and national levels in order to combat youth unemployment. It announces in particular:

- A Council Recommendation to Member States on introducing the **Youth Guarantee** to ensure that all young people up to age 25 receive a good quality offer of a job, continued education, an apprenticeship or a traineeship within four months of leaving formal education or becoming unemployed. The Council Recommendation on Establishing a Youth Guarantee was adopted on 22 April 2013⁶;
- A **Quality Framework for Traineeships**: By mid-February 2013, the social partners had not decided to negotiate an agreement. The Commission will thus present a related proposal by December 2013;
- A **European Alliance for Apprenticeships** to improve the quality and supply of apprenticeships across the EU, bringing together stakeholders from authorities, business and social partners, VET researchers and practitioners, and youth representatives. It will pool existing actions under a common umbrella and promote the benefits and methods of successful apprenticeship schemes and ways to improve existing schemes. It will be launched in July 2013;
- Initiatives on improving EU-wide **mobility for young people**, underlining the role of the Your First EURES Job initiative.

¹ January 2013

² Eurostat, (2013). *March 2013 - Euro Area Unemployment Rate at 12.1%*, Eurostat News Release, 30.4.2013, http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY_PUBLIC/3-30042013-BP/EN/3-30042013-BP-EN.PDF

³ COM (2010) 477 final of 15.09.2012

⁴ European Commission, (2011). *Youth Opportunities Initiative*, COM(2011) 933, Brussels, 20.12.2011

⁵ COM (2012) 727-728-729 of 05.12.2012

⁶ <http://register.consilium.europa.eu/pdf/en/13/st06/st06944.en13.pdf>

The implementation of these measures will be particularly supported by the European Social Fund and the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI)⁷ which is co-funded by the ESF.

The Commission also stressed the important role that the European Social Fund (ESF) will play in supporting the proposed measures. Member States facing high youth unemployment rates are expected to identify young unemployed persons as a specific target group for ESF funding. Partnership Agreements and Operational Programmes for the period 2014-2020 are expected to focus on school-to-work transitions and the possibility to introduce Youth Guarantee schemes, as well as on the labour market integration of young people. The Commission stresses that it will continue to provide financial support through the ESF to improve the employment situation for young people through traineeship schemes and to improve the functioning of the apprenticeship system. In addition, as part of the Youth Opportunities Initiative, it was announced that €1.3 million of ESF technical assistance would be used to support setting up apprenticeship-type schemes through the ESF.

As such, the '**Providing targeted advice on ESF support to apprenticeship and traineeship schemes**' project plays an important role in supporting the policy aims set out above by:

- Assisting the Commission in supporting governmental bodies at national and regional level and social partners in **setting up new apprenticeship and traineeship schemes, using ESF support**; and
- Assisting the Commission in supporting governmental bodies at national and regional level and social partners in **improving the quality and performance of existing apprenticeship and traineeship programmes**.

These aims will be achieved through the delivery of an integrated package of targeted capacity-building support, comprising:

- Two research-led exercises: a review of existing apprenticeship and traineeship schemes and their effectiveness and an analysis of the measures in new ESF Operational Programmes dedicated to setting up or improving apprenticeship or traineeship schemes;
- Two events to facilitate mutual learning: one focused on disseminating good practice in designing and delivering schemes and identifying the needs for advice and support, and the other focusing on monitoring and evaluation to support implementation;
- A Consultancy Helpdesk to provide advice and training to bodies setting up or seeking to improve apprenticeship schemes;
- A website with a shared information exchange platform to encourage visibility and participation in the initiative;
- A programme of awareness-raising activities and events to engage and maintain the participation of stakeholders.

More information about the project: <http://ec.europa.eu/social/youthtraining>

⁷ COM (2013)144, 145, 146 of 12 March 2012