

European Semester Country Reports 2016

Mentions of developments linked to apprenticeships and work-based learning

Member States	Mention
AUSTRIA	No mention
BELGIUM	<p>The three regions and the German speaking Community are simplifying, streamlining and reforming the employment policy instruments. As a result of the 6th State Reform, various additional employment policy levers have been transferred to the regional and community levels as of July 2014, including monitoring of job search requirements, apprenticeship support schemes as well as employment incentives for specific target groups.</p> <p>The regional social partners, meanwhile, have concluded an agreement which aims for a thorough streamlining of the various qualitative support measures for those most removed from the labour, including through in-company learning ("werkplekleren"), job coaching ("tijdelijke werkervarings-programma's"), as well as subsidized work experience and apprenticeship programmes ("individuele beroepsopleidingen").</p>
BULGARIA	<p>Bulgaria also benefits from EUR 55 million under the Youth Employment Initiative (matched by the same amount from the European Social Fund) supporting the provision of traineeships, apprenticeships, first job experience and start-up support for young people not in employment, education or training.</p> <p>Participation in vocational education remains high but quality and cooperation with business and social partners appear insufficient. Newly-adopted legislation and strategies in education and training have not yet been translated into concrete measures.</p> <p>Participation in vocational education and training (VET) at upper secondary level is above the EU average. Employment and activity rates of upper secondary VET graduates are better than the ones for upper secondary graduates as a whole. Modernisation efforts in vocational education and training include an action plan 2015-2017 for the VET strategy, recently adopted amendments in the VET legislation, and by-laws/ordinances. Their aim is to ensure quality of vocational education and training, to introduce work-based learning, to adapt VET curricula to labour market needs and to embed a system for validation of non-formally and informally acquired learning outcomes.</p>
CROATIA	<p>Shortcomings in the education system make the transition to the labour market more difficult. The level of participation in vocational education and training (VET) at upper secondary level in Croatia is one of the highest in the EU, at 71.1 % against an EU average of 48.9 % in 2013. However, the employment rate of upper secondary graduates is one of the lowest. What is more, about 45 % of these graduates are employed in jobs outside their field of education, and around one third below their skills level. One third of employers report difficulties in recruiting suitable employees... In addition to labour market conditions and outdated curricula and limited opportunities for high quality work-based learning also contribute to the poor employment outcomes of recent graduates at all levels.</p> <p>Implementation of policies to improve the labour market relevance of education is slow... To modernise outdated curricula and increase work-based learning, Croatia is currently drafting a programme for the development of VET. Given that the private sector plays a minor role in the funding of VET, the sustainability of the reform and its pace will highly depend on the absorption of EU funds and on human resources in schools. Finally, the so-called advanced labour market information system, a forecasting and vocational guidance and career development tool, is being launched at the beginning of 2016.</p>
CYPRUS	No country report
DENMARK	<p>Improving the quality and attractiveness of vocational education and training remains a key challenge. The vocational education and training reform implemented from mid-2015 sets ambitious targets. Early reports are positive and indicate that drop-out rates have decreased. However, strengthening the supply of apprenticeships remains a crucial issue.</p> <p>Strengthening the supply of apprenticeships remains a crucial issue. Denmark has the highest proportion of VET students in work-based programmes of all the EU countries. However more apprenticeship places in companies are still needed. In October 2015 some 5% of VET students were actively searching for an apprenticeship place, while about 8% were only in in-education internships. Over the last few years, 50 placement centres have been established. These are responsible for cooperating with local businesses on creating apprenticeships and offering school-based internships. In January 2015, a joint report from the government and social partners estimated that the supply of apprenticeships could still be increased by 59% compared with the 2012 level.</p>
ESTONIA	<p>Similarly, some progress was made in ... increasing the labour market relevance of vocational education and training, in particular by improving the availability of apprenticeships.</p> <p>The government is implementing reforms to raise the proportion of vocational education and training (VET) students in apprenticeships, and to address the high number of VET dropouts... In April 2015 the government adopted, and is now implementing, a VET programme for 2015-2018 that, with funding from the European Structural and Investment Funds, will modernise the work experience system, extend the apprenticeship programme and develop entrepreneurship training.</p>
Finland	<p>While the rate of young people neither in employment, nor in education and training (NEET) (10.2 %) has remained relatively stable, it peaked in 2014. Finland has implemented the Youth Guarantee well in recent years with a large share of beneficiaries receiving offers for a job, a traineeship, apprenticeship or further education after registering with the public employment services.</p> <p>In Finland, 70 % of upper secondary students follow vocational programmes, which is one of the highest shares in Europe (56). Some 15.7 % of initial vocational students are in programmes that combine work- and school-based training, against the EU average of 26.5 %. There is scope for increasing work-based learning opportunities, such as apprenticeship schemes, which have proven efficient in providing the skills needed in the labour market.</p> <p>Integrating foreign nationals, in particular those from outside the EU, into the education system is an increasing challenge... A variety of measures are being put in place to address this situation. For instance, pupils from migrant backgrounds have the right to language classes and additional support for accessing all levels of education. They receive support through preparatory training for secondary school and additional language instruction for apprenticeships.</p>
FRANCE	<p>...the structure of the labour market appears more and more segmented and educational inequalities are widening. Jobseekers have only limited access to training, the access of the low-qualified to apprenticeships is decreasing and the educational results of low achievers are dropping.</p> <p>Educational inequalities linked to the socio-economic background are among the highest in the OECD countries. The link between education and the labour market is still weak and the access to apprenticeships is decreasing, especially for the low-qualified.</p> <p>The link between education and the labour market is still weak with the low qualified experiencing difficult transition, which might be explained by the inefficient governance of the vocational education and training and of the apprenticeship systems. In that respect, the future personal activity account (compte personnel d'activité), due to enter into force in January 2017, may help reduce disparities by attaching training rights directly to workers.</p> <p>Potential growth is also linked to labour force's skills. In France, the link between education and the labour market is still weak with the low qualified experiencing difficult transition. The governance of the vocational education and training and of the apprenticeship systems is not optimal (see Section 3.2). The quality of the training provided is decisive, notably as regards the matching between vocational training and firms' needs.</p> <p>...the findings of the December 2015 specific monitoring report. Since then, on 18 January 2016 the main features of a plan to fight unemployment, including training initiatives for jobseekers, a reinforcement of the apprenticeship system and incentives for SMEs hiring with contracts longer than six months, were announced (see Section 3.2) and the commitment to fully undertake and then implement all announced reforms reiterated.</p> <p>The recourse to apprenticeship is decreasing, especially for low-qualified categories, while the governance of the apprenticeship system remains fragmented. On 18 January 2016, an extension of apprenticeship to new qualifications was announced, enabling access throughout the year, accompanied by increased cooperation between apprenticeship and vocational education structures.</p>

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	<p>The number of registered apprentices during the school year 2014-2015 was slightly above 400,000, far away from the national objective of 500,000 contracts for 2017 despite the first signs of improvement observed at the end of 2015. The trend is more negative for ISCED 0-2 level (below 'baccalauréat'), with a decline in the entry rate of 7.1 %. Among the reasons that could explain this declining trend are competition with newly created schemes such as the 'emplois d'avenir' signed in the market sector, as well as the complex governance of the apprenticeship system.</p> <p>While the Sapin law of 5 March 2014 improved the governance of the system by substantially reducing the number of actors collecting the apprenticeship tax ('taxe d'apprentissage'), such number is still high. Moreover, the coordination of different regional strategies remains insufficient. There is also no specific financial incentive to take low-qualified apprentices, while studies show that recourse to apprenticeship by firms depend on cost and benefit analyses (91).</p>
GERMANY	No mention
GREECE	No country report
HUNGARY	<p>In 2013/2014 only 22% of students in special vocational schools and 9% of students in post-secondary VET schools participated in apprenticeship schemes. The number of apprentices has increased significantly, but according to the Hungarian Chamber of Commerce (63) the number of students undergoing work-based training at firms did not increase between 2010 and 2014. Companies' willingness to provide training is increasing only slowly despite financial and organisational incentives. There is a lack of qualified employees willing to train students. In several professions there are not enough training places and offers are sometimes not adjusted to the demand. The Chamber of Commerce is a strategic partner of the government, but no consultation with other stakeholders has been taking place in this area.</p> <p>Reforms to the further and vocational education and training sector are also continuing and are aimed at ensuring that training and apprenticeships are relevant to labour market needs.</p>
IRELAND	<p>... 25 new types of apprenticeship are in development. Following an evaluation process undertaken by the Apprenticeship Council – actively involving social partners, further education bodies and the Department of Education and Skills – the new types of apprenticeships selected have been tailor-made to labour market needs. They range in duration from two to four years, and will be offered at Levels 4 to 7 on the European Qualifications Framework (ISCED 3-7). This is the first time that apprenticeships will be available at graduate level in Ireland. If properly implemented, the introduction of these new apprenticeships has the potential to contribute to the ambitious National Skills Strategy commitment to support 50 000 modern apprenticeship and traineeship places by 2020 and to address skills needs and shortages in relevant sectors.</p>
ITALY	<p>Preliminary evidence suggests that the new discipline for contracts and the accompanying tax relief are having an impact on job creation and duality. Some initial positive outcomes may be seen, in particular as regards the shift to open-ended hiring, although a proper assessment of its effectiveness will have to be made once the social security contribution relief expires in 2016. According to data released by the National Institute for Social Security (INPS), the number of new open-ended hires increased by 37 % in the first eleven months of 2015 compared to the same period of 2014, while new apprenticeship and collaboration contracts dropped by about 20 % and new fixed-term contracts increased only marginally, by about 1.5 %.</p> <p>The Italian apprenticeships system has been reviewed recently but concerns remain about the quality of provisions. Apprenticeships leading to a professional certificate or a diploma will be integrated in regional Vocational Education and Training systems of three and four years duration as a dual system involving both schools and companies. With an additional year of apprenticeship, they will give access to vocationally oriented tertiary education. Professional apprenticeships which previously targeted only young people (aged 18-29) are extended to include adult workers who have been made redundant. The reform is a good step towards a more integrated and attractive apprenticeships system, but no specific quality criteria are set for the companies offering apprenticeships.</p>
LATVIA	<p>Apprenticeship type schemes are underdeveloped in Latvia. A pilot project, called work-based learning pilot, was implemented during 2013-2015 to test different approaches. The legislative amendments in 2015 introduced work-based learning as one type of acquiring VET. However, a clear and consistent legislative framework is not in place. The main characteristics of work-based learning are not specified, and further uncertainties remain, especially in relation to the pay and status of the student as well as organisational aspects. Motivating companies to provide quality work-based learning and practical training placements is problematic. The government has analysed the possible options (lower minimum wages for apprentices, tax reliefs, stipends) to provide financial support for employers taking on an apprentice or trainee, but decisions are not taken yet.</p>
LITHUANIA	<p>The government has set up vocational education and training (VET) programmes to improve the quality of the labour force. The 2014-2016 action plan for the development of vocational training envisages more on-the-job training, a broader range of apprenticeship programmes and modular vocational education and training provision. Nevertheless, the alignment of current VET programmes with the labour market's needs remains weak and social partners are only marginally involved. A better alignment would, for example, include the design of occupational and sectoral qualification structures, joint labour market projections or a suitable curriculum development.</p>
LUXEMBOURG	<p>National data point to 39 % of Youth Guarantee beneficiaries having received a 'quality job offer' (48) within four months of their enrolment. 79 % received within nine months. The stronger cooperation of the public employment services with employers and other services and partners is a positive element. Employers offer additional positions to apprentices and partner businesses that participate in the 'Jobelo' programme targeting unskilled young people. Nevertheless, an assessment of the extent to which the quality of the offers and the extent to which they lead to sustainable labour market integration of young people involved is not available.</p> <p>Adapting vocational education and training provision to the constantly changing labour market needs is another challenge. Luxembourg has vocational training paths based on dual training, but some of these paths continue to be mainly school-based. While the share of upper secondary students participating in vocationally oriented educational programmes stands at around 60 %, the education attainment rate at medium level vocational orientation (61) is comparatively low, which suggests early school leaving and difficulties in progressing to higher levels. A considerable number of vocational education and training learners come from a migrant background, following early tracking in the school path at the end of the previous school cycle. In this area, targeted measures exist to tackle the linguistic issue.</p> <p>Following the vocational education and training reform in 2008, it was acknowledged that readjustments to the system were needed, in particular due to organisational issues encountered with the modular system introduced with that reform. A draft law on vocational education and training was submitted to Parliament in early 2015 to address the above concerns and ensure quality learning outcomes but it was blocked for constitutional reasons. In October 2015, the evaluation of the vocational education and training system commissioned by the government identified five fields of action to be taken into account when amending the current draft. These include closer cooperation between the ministry, professional chambers and schools, revision of the high number of training programmes, also given their varying quality and lack of consistency, reintroduction of a yearly performance evaluation, improving guidance in schools and increasing the number of apprenticeships.</p>
MAI TA	<p>The provision of vocational education and training and the apprenticeship scheme are being strengthened.</p> <p>The supply and quality of apprenticeships is still too limited. The minimum share of the on-the-job training in the overall apprenticeship programme is not set in the legislation. Apprenticeship programmes with separate provision of off-the-job and on-the-job learning has often resulted in learning experience disconnected one from another (45). An adequate supply of apprenticeships is an appropriate way to accelerate the adjustment of skills supply to specific labour market demand, thereby equipping graduates with relevant occupational skills.</p>

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MALTA	Malta has made efforts to reform and strengthen the apprenticeship governance (46) and to create a 'culture' for apprenticeships aimed at attracting large number of both students (including foreign students) and employers. The government acknowledges that there is scope to expand the supply as regards sectors and qualifications levels and to develop their quality and labour market relevance (47). The authorities intend to develop a harmonised legal framework on apprenticeships which would also define the employment status of apprentices. Further measures are announced in the 2016 budget, i.e. "Job Practice" to offer students a chance to increase their skills portfolio, but the extent to which they will meet the challenge remains to be assessed.
NETHERLANDS	In 2014, several initiatives were launched to increase the amount of work-based training in vocational education and training programmes. Particular attention has also been given to improving the general quality of education, offering incentives for employers to provide more and better quality internships and more opportunities for students' personal development, including doing more to avoid students dropping out. Further changes are expected to be made to increase the amount of work-based learning in vocational education and training programmes. EUR 400 million will become available as of 2015 from investment and performance budgets created as part of the quality agreements in secondary vocational education.
POLAND	Similarly, the quality and labour market relevance of initial vocational education and training (iVET) is still limited. The practical preparation of teachers of vocational subjects, the quality of teaching in general subjects and the quality of career and educational counselling in secondary schools remain a challenge. Systematic cooperation with companies to improve the link with the labour market is missing. The mismatch between qualifications required by the labour market and those provided by VET schools remains significant. The funding method for VET means that regional authorities fund VET programmes even if qualifications are not in demand, while it discourages them from funding vocational qualifications that are more costly to provide (19).
PORTUGAL	Portugal has increased substantially the enrolment rates in vocational education and training (VET) over the past four years, while taking steps towards improving its labour market relevance. Enrolment in apprenticeships increased by 60% between 2011 and 2014 and in 2015 the enrolment in the new TeSP courses increased almost seven times compared with the previous year.
ROMANIA	Integration of young people in the labour market remains a challenge. In 2015, youth unemployment decreased to 22 %, but remains slightly above the EU average. The share of young people not in employment, education or training (NEET) (Graph 3.2.3) is significantly above the EU average (17 % versus 12 %). Key measures such as support for traineeships and apprenticeships, skills certification and mobility packages have had a more limited take-up than initially expected. The new government intends to draw up a national apprenticeship plan for the priority sectors identified in the national competitiveness strategy. A more integrated approach, offering pathways to NEETs and centred on the public employment service, is being developed with the support of EU funds.
SLOVAKIA	In 2015 Slovakia introduced a dual vocational education training system, but interest among potential participants remains limited. Against the background of employers reporting increasing skill shortages, a better implementation of apprenticeship system could facilitate meeting labour market needs. For the academic year 2016/2017, 298 employers were approved with 2 763 apprenticeships available. The bottleneck, however, is an apparent low level of interest from young people. This is to be addressed through a campaign on the benefits of the system, planned for 2016. As little data exists for assessing labour market relevance of vocational education and training, greater monitoring could improve policy development.
SLOVENIA	Several activities in the area of education and training are ongoing. Slovenia has launched a National Skills Strategy Project, which will identify skills needs and bottlenecks and encourage cooperation between responsible government bodies. The Project is expected to be finalised in 2017... There has not yet been an agreement on the new apprenticeship legislation.
SPAIN	The National Youth Guarantee System (NYGS) is not yet delivering the expected results and the share of registrations remains low... The role and contribution of regional public employment services in providing young NEET with an offer of employment, traineeship, apprenticeship or further education within the four-month time limit is still unclear. In 2014/15, the new dual modality of VET programmes was run in all autonomous communities. The number of educational institutions (728) and companies (4 878) offering dual VET has risen considerably since the beginning of its implementation, and the number of students enrolled in dual VET (16 199) has quadrupled since 2012. However, it still remains low compared with the overall participation in VET programmes. In 2014, the government offered new financial incentives to enterprises to support participation in dual training under the 2012-2014 Strategy for Entrepreneurship and Youth Employment. Dual training via distance learning is also facilitated by e-learning platforms developed with quality criteria common to those of traditional learning. The clarification of the roles of all stakeholders in work-based learning remains a challenge, in order to match the positive rapid extension of this approach. In the third framework agreement applicable for 2015-2017, signed in July 2015, the social partners agreed to work together in the establishment of the single training account for all workers, and the definition of a new training needs catalogue in enterprises, as well as a better evaluation of the delivered professional training, among other activities. The Chambers of Commerce are getting progressively involved in the scheme at national and regional level to encourage participation by local businesses, but the low capacity of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to absorb trainees and the lack of training for tutors in companies are still obstacles to building good-quality dual VET and ensuring greater employability of students.
SWEDEN	Dual programmes combining work experience with education have been rolled out but have encountered some obstacles; in particular that they do not achieve sufficient employer buy-in. Vocational education and training (VET) is often seen as a second best alternative. In particular, opportunities to transfer between types of education (between vocational and academic programmes) and from dual VET programmes to higher education are non-existent or lack flexibility, which has a negative impact on the image and attractiveness of VET. Training paths are still hampered by relatively weak links and compatibility between upper secondary school, adult education and training for the unemployed, and the apprenticeship system for adults. Considerable policy efforts have been devoted to helping integration. Sweden is at the forefront of developing policies to promote all aspects of migrant integration. Instruments include a two-year introduction programme with Swedish language and other job-related training, a comprehensive system validating qualifications, and help with finding housing. Moreover, more recent attempts have been made, in the spring 2015 budget and the 2016 budget, to improve the reception and introduction process and speed up the entry into the labour market. The new measures include fast-tracks to jobs, better and quicker validation of formal and informal qualifications and skills, including validation for migrants qualified as teachers (in the context of the teacher shortage discussed below), and better targeted and customised measures combining work and language or other training (including vocational training).
	As regards the labour market, the United Kingdom has announced various policies to address skills mismatches by increasing the engagement of employers in the delivery of apprenticeships. This includes increasing the role of employers in the allocation of funding for apprenticeships and introducing reform of qualifications. The UK has a very competitive regime for the taxation of labour income. The taxation of labour income is 38 %. In order to improve skills, the government announced that it will impose a 0.5 % charge on employment costs of businesses to fund an apprenticeship levy.

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Member States	Mention
UNITED KINGDOM	Provision for expansion and simplification of vocational training routes is underway. In 2014-2015 numbers of apprenticeship starts have increased for the first time since 2010-2011 and people aged 25 and over are still the predominant age group. The push to deliver 3 million new apprenticeships by 2020 will be funded by a levy on large employers amounting to 0.5 % of an employer's pay bill starting in April 2017. The levy will be paid into an apprenticeship fund. Employers will be incentivised to offer more apprenticeships as they will be able to recoup the levy only by using the fund for training apprentices. In the best case scenario, the levy is expected to stimulate employer behaviour and influence their workforce development planning. There is a danger of rebranding existing graduate programmes without effect on the productivity and skills, so monitoring the quality of apprenticeship training will be key. In November 2015, reforms to increase the transparency and decrease the complexity of technical and professional routes have been announced, with an expert report expected in March 2016.
	There is a lot of demand for ICT professionals, but computer science graduate numbers have been falling over a number of years. These graduates are somewhat slower to make the transition of ICT professionals into the labour market due to a possible skills mismatch. The policy response has been to extensively involve employers in the development of new institutions of higher technical education such as National Colleges, University Technical Colleges, and Institutes for Technology and Degree Apprenticeships .
	Overall, the UK does well or better than other EU countries on a number of fronts in education and training. However there are potentially weaknesses in vocational and adult skills systems that are disproportionately affecting young disadvantaged people. The apprenticeship reforms which put employers in charge of skills development will need to be monitored closely to ensure quality in addition to quantity of apprenticeships.
	Some progress in the delivery of apprenticeships as several developments have occurred in the past year , including policy announcements affecting the quantity and quality of apprenticeships up to 2020. Legislation obliges the Government to report on progress towards targets (in England). Employer engagement is obliged via an Apprenticeship levy affecting Employers with payrolls greater than GBP 3m per annum. A new funding pilot is being trialled giving employers greater control over spending on training delivery.
	ENGLAND
	In addressing the challenge of youth not in education, employment, or training (NEET), the policy focus has been on maintaining engagement with young persons at risk of becoming NEET. An example of this policy in England is increasing the school or other mandatory participation age to 18 years. Since the May 2015 general election, an "earn or learn" approach has been announced to support NEETs claiming state benefits , although it is not scheduled to be introduced before April 2017. The approach will introduce a three-week programme of support to young people to enable them to find work, an apprenticeship or training within six months. Other ongoing robust engagements include traineeships, work experience placements, sector-based work academies, the intensive activity programme, work skills pilots, the Movement to Work initiative and the Youth Unemployment Innovation Fund. The increase in the availability of apprenticeships will also contribute to the range of policy response in the area of NEETs. No new policy measures aimed at NEETs not claiming benefits have been introduced, although this group represents the larger share of NEETs.
	Beyond a welcome expansion of work-based learning opportunities, the quality of apprenticeships in England also requires focus. A report on apprenticeships by the UK Government's Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) acknowledged improvements being made, but criticised the quality of apprenticeships as "variable and poor", failing to target the skills shortages in the economy, to focus on improving quality and to engage employers, especially SMEs. Out of 190 inspected programmes, 72 were judged to require improvement and 21 were inadequate, affecting 73 000 apprentices. The report also criticised schools for not doing enough to promote apprenticeships. In addition, the level of qualification acquired through apprenticeships tends to be low. In 2014-2015 the highest level of apprenticeships made up only 4 % of total apprenticeship starts. The middle and lowest level recorded figures of 36 % and 60 % respectively. Most apprenticeships take place in the service sector, with three quarters of starts concentrated in three sectors: business, administration & law; health, public services & care; and retail & commercial enterprise. Criticism has been raised that apprenticeships are decoupled from occupations and therefore not rigorous enough.
	SCOTLAND
	In Scotland, the government has emphasised the need to increase the number of apprenticeships. It aims to raise the number of apprenticeships from 25 000 in 2013-2014 to 30 000 in 2020 under its Modern Apprenticeship programme overseen by Skills Development Scotland. Under the programme, skills investment plans and regional skills assessments will be used to ensure that apprenticeships are closely linked to areas of economic growth and job opportunities. There will be a particular focus on the creation of apprenticeships in STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) subjects.
	WALES
In Wales, under the Policy Statement on Skills and the Skills Implementation Plan, the government has developed a series of Skills Performance Measures and a Flexible Skills Programme to provide targeted interventions if recruitment and skills needs cannot be met through existing provision or there is a case for targeted intervention by the government. The government offers a number of apprenticeship programmes to raise the number of apprentices and boost skills.	
NORTHERN IRELAND	
In Northern Ireland, the government's overarching skills policy framework is the Skills Strategy for Northern Ireland, known as 'Success through Skills – Transforming Futures'. The achievement of the strategic aims and the commitment to increase the skills of the workforce, including through the development of labour market relevant apprenticeships , is delivered through the Skills to Succeed programme.	
Source:	European Semester Country Reports 2016: http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/making-it-happen/country-specific-recommendations/index_en.htm