



Information Note

12 October 2016, Brussels

Highlights on Apprenticeships from the reports on “Youth Guarantee and Youth Employment Initiative Three Years On”

Non-exhaustive Summary

Introduction

- Against the background of high youth unemployment, Member States adopted the Council recommendation on a Youth Guarantee (YG) in April 2013. The aim is to give every young person a good-quality offer of employment, continued education, **an apprenticeship** or a traineeship within a period of 4 months of becoming unemployed or leaving formal education.
- The establishment of the YG went hand-in-hand with policy guidance and financial support from the EU level, notably through the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI) with an initial EUR 6.4 billion funding. In addition, it has been accompanied by other measures, in particular the launch of the **European Alliance for Apprenticeships**. On 4 October 2016, three years on a Communication and several background documents on the YG and YEI were adopted by the European Commission (see further information).

Main messages

- The adoption of the **Youth Guarantee** and the **launch of the European Alliance for Apprenticeships** in 2013 have **put more focus on apprenticeships as a measure to facilitate school-to-work transitions**. Almost all Member States put in place measures to strengthen their apprenticeship system. Significant action has been taken in order to improve in particular the quality, supply, and **attractiveness** of apprenticeships, in the spirit of the European Alliance for Apprenticeships.
- **In a number of countries, structural reforms have been carried out to existing apprenticeship systems** (e.g. BE, FR, SI, UK), **while in others apprenticeship systems have been created**, where they previously did not exist or existed on a very small scale (e.g. BG, ES, LV, LT, SK).
- 14 million young people have entered Youth Guarantee schemes since January 2014. Around **9 million** young people took up an offer. Of all the offers made within the four-month period, the majority were for employment (70.2%), followed by education (13.6%), traineeships (12.1%) and **apprenticeships (4.1%), that is around 369,000 people**.
- On average, apprenticeships account for just 2.5% of known offers, **with Spain and Austria the only countries to report more than 10% apprenticeships** (12.5% and 12.1% respectively).
- **However, such figures should be interpreted with caution, taking into account the challenges associated with categorising offers, especially offers of apprenticeships and continued education offers**. In Member States that do not report apprenticeships as a specific type of YG offer, it is still possible for young people registered with the YG to start an apprenticeship. In practice, in these Member States, apprenticeships are considered to be part of the regular education system and are recorded in the monitoring data as offers of continued education.

Next steps for the Youth Guarantee in the area of apprenticeships

- As regards apprenticeships, the implementation of a **pilot project for the longer term mobility of apprentices** will provide the necessary knowledge and experience to design a more permanent scheme in the near future.
- Moreover, the development of a **quality framework for apprenticeships would complement the existing strategy** which aims at valorising apprenticeships and making them more attractive for young people and companies alike.

Key developments related to apprenticeships

Social inclusion and supporting early school leavers

- In **Cyprus**, the New Modern Apprenticeship Scheme includes **preparatory apprenticeships** that support early school leavers to enter apprenticeship programmes as well as core apprentice programmes.
- **In Germany, assisted apprenticeships** are designed to help a greater number of disadvantaged young people to successfully complete a dual vocational training course. Young people supported by this measure receive individual and continuous support and social pedagogical mentoring while receiving training in a company.
- **In England (UK)**, it is expected to provide policy responses in the area of NEETs, or in **Estonia**, where it is expected to address the high number of VET dropouts.
- In **Austria**, new training offers, such as standardised curricula for **low-threshold entry qualifications and partial qualifications**, have been developed for disadvantaged young persons, following the 2015 reform of the VET act.

Expanding offers of traineeships and apprenticeships within existing vacancy databases

- **Traineeship and apprenticeship vacancies are not always integrated with PES' vacancy databases**, in part due to overall responsibility resting with another agency or organisation. **Less than half of PES have access to a database of apprenticeships** or traineeships.
- **However, a number of PES have taken steps, or report plans, to incorporate traineeship and apprenticeship positions into existing vacancy databases, develop a new training database, and/or improve young people's awareness of or access to training offers.** These recent initiatives have been supported by the new EURES Regulation which requires Member States to make apprenticeships and traineeships available to the EURES portal, provided that successful applicants are subject to an employment relationship.
- In the **UK**, the 'Universal Jobmatch' site advertises job and training positions, but a dedicated apprenticeships website is also available. Dedicated websites for advertising traineeships and/or apprenticeships are also available in **Ireland, Hungary and the Netherlands**. Similarly, in **Belgium** (German-speaking community), apprenticeship vacancies are published on the PES' online job portal since February 2014.

Improving the provision of quality offers: focus on apprenticeship and traineeship reforms

- **Though not within the direct scope of the Recommendation, structural reforms in the field of apprenticeships** and traineeships (including reforms in legal frameworks and new support measures) **played a major role in supporting the delivery of quality Youth Guarantee offers**, which better equip young people to enter the labour market.
- The **focus of the apprenticeship reforms varies from one Member State to another depending on their respective starting points and specific needs**. The chapters below take a look at various aims of these reforms.

Strengthening the status and the quality of apprenticeships to enhance their attractiveness

- In order for apprenticeships to be an **attractive option** of initial vocational training, they need to have the same status as school-based VET and general education. These different education pathways should lead all to a formal qualification of equal status, giving access to further training possibilities. **Apprenticeships should have their place in the National Qualifications Frameworks. Attractiveness of apprenticeships depends also on the attractiveness of the occupations they lead to and the possibilities of accessing the labour market.**
- While in some countries, apprenticeships are on equal footing with school-based vocational training (such as in the **Netherlands** and in **Portugal**, the status of apprenticeships remains a concern in many Member States.
- The **Danish** apprenticeship reform, passed in 2013 and implemented from mid-2015 onwards, aims at offering apprentices the opportunity to obtain a general upper-secondary qualification **opening access to higher education**.
- In **Italy**, the apprenticeship system was reformed in 2011, but a further reform was carried out in 2015. As part of this recent reform, apprenticeships leading to a professional certificate or a diploma have been integrated in regional VET systems. With an additional year of apprenticeship, **they will give access to vocationally oriented tertiary education**.
- **Referencing apprenticeships in the NQF** demonstrates clearly their value in the education and training system. Under the reformed apprenticeship system, **Ireland** will be offering apprenticeships at the European Qualifications Framework Levels 4 to 7, **which means that apprenticeships will be available also at graduate level**. This reform addresses specifically skills shortages in certain sectors and contributes to the National Skills Strategy commitment of 50,000 apprenticeship and traineeship places by 2020.
- **In Malta, the apprenticeships are linked to the national Malta Qualifications Framework (MQF)**. According to the National Reform Programme of 2016, there are now over 40 courses at MQF Levels 3 and 4 that form part of the Apprenticeship Scheme and around 700 apprentices are benefitting from such courses.
- As for **quality**, the on-going VET reform process in **Slovenia** includes several measures that increase the role and the scope of practical training in companies, with the aim of increasing the quality and **attractiveness of VET** and facilitating the transition from education to work. In **Austria** the Reform of the Vocational Training Act in 2015 strengthened the quality management in the apprenticeship training system, and a key element in the **United Kingdom** apprenticeship reform is monitoring its quality. **France** and **Cyprus** have used **communication campaigns to improve the image of apprenticeships**.

Multi-stakeholder initiatives involving social partners

- **At EU level, social partners negotiated a Framework of Actions (FoA) on Youth Employment** in June 2013 and undertook a range of actions in this context. They were, among others, involved in VET and apprenticeship reforms, outreach and awareness raising (among their respective member organisations or to a wider public), as well as promoting the **attractiveness of jobs** in sectors and professions that are facing current, or projected, skills shortages.
- In **Germany**, in 2014, the Federal Government, together with the Länder, the private sector, trade unions and the Federal Employment Agency, launched the “Alliance for Initial and Further Training 2015-2018”. The Alliance aims to improve the **attractiveness of VET**, upgrade young people’s skills and improve school-to-work transitions. As part of the Alliance, the private sector has committed to offering 20,000 additional VET places each year (compared to the number of places registered with the PES in 2014) and to offer 500,000 traineeships each year for the purpose of career orientation.

Reforming apprenticeship governance and legal framework

- The aim of apprenticeship reforms can also be to strengthen and to simplify the apprenticeship governance as well as the rules regulating it, and thus making apprenticeships a **more attractive option**. **Belgium (Wallonia)** has decided to coordinate the governance of the 2 existing systems, and to harmonise the apprenticeship status for the under 18-year-olds (payments and allowances, training plans, mentoring promotion).
- In **Ireland**, a new Apprenticeship Council (involving social partners) has been established to enhance governance and to advise and support the development of new apprenticeships. Ireland is developing around 25 new apprenticeships in labour market relevant areas.

Expanding apprenticeships to new trades and modernising existing curricula

- Some reforms aim at modernising outdated apprenticeships which are provided in trades that no longer are in demand, or where the curricula are not adapted to the needs of a modern labour market.
- **Hungary**, where reforms were launched already in 2011, aims at ensuring that training and apprenticeships are relevant to the labour market needs, in particular by expanding and **mainstreaming apprenticeship in the training for blue-collar jobs**.
- In **Ireland**, apprenticeships were over-dependant on the construction sector, which suffered from significant redundancies following the economic downturn. As part of the on-going reforms, new curricula **are being rolled out in five of the most popular trades (ICT, financial services, transport and tourism and hospitality)**, to be put in place during 2016. A curriculum review and modernisation are underway in the remaining trades.
- In **Cyprus**, the New Modern Apprenticeship Scheme, which since 2012-2013 has replaced the earlier apprenticeship programme, **is being introduced in new occupations and new sectors**, on the basis of forecasts of labour market needs. Also reforms in **Croatia** and **Estonia** aim at modernising vocational curricula which are considered out-dated. In addition, **Estonia** is increasing work-based learning which currently does not offer sufficient possibilities.
- **France** has announced measures which include a reinforcement of the apprenticeship system and the **extension of apprenticeship to new qualifications**. In **Scotland (UK)**, under the Modern Apprenticeship 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. Particular focus will be on the creation of apprenticeships in STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) subjects.

Increasing the numbers of apprentices

- To cater for a growing interest in apprenticeships, many countries are working to increase their offer. In this regard, **increasing employer engagement remains crucial**. This has been the key element of reforms in **Malta**, as well as in **Denmark**, where over 50 placement centres have been established in recent years, responsible for cooperating with local businesses on creating apprenticeships and offering school-based traineeships.
- In **Portugal**, adjustments to apprenticeships resulted in a 60% increase in enrolments between 2011 and 2014, and from 21,056 young persons in the year 2011–12 to 33,666 persons in 2012–13.
- The different regions in the **United Kingdom** have set particularly ambitious quantitative targets for apprenticeships: Under the Modern Apprenticeship programme **Scotland** aims at raising the number of apprenticeships from 25,000 in 2013–2014 to 30,000 in 2020. In 2014–2015 the number of apprenticeship increased for the first time since 2010–2011. In **Wales (UK)**, the government has also announced its aims to raise the number of apprentices. In **Luxembourg**, the need to increase the number of apprenticeships was reaffirmed through an evaluation of the VET system.

Validation of prior learning

- In the **UK**, accreditation of prior learning is built into the Youth Contract and Work Programme, and apprenticeships also have provision for recognising previous experience, which can contribute towards the accumulation of credits.

Cross-border cooperation on apprenticeships

- **In 2015, Belgium, France, Germany and Luxembourg signed an agreement on strengthening cross-border collaboration in the area of apprenticeships.** This agreement should help young people access apprenticeships easier by allowing them to have part of the apprenticeship in the education system of one country and part of the apprenticeship in a firm of another country. Such an agreement is particularly beneficial for Luxembourg, which due to the small size of the country cannot offer certain diplomas in the national education system.
- In 2015, Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia, with EU support, including financial support, formed a **Baltic Alliance for Apprenticeships** to co-operate for the promotion of apprenticeships and WBL. The **Nordic Countries** (SE, FI, DK, NO, ICE) worked together in a 3-year project “WBL in the Nordic countries”, financed by the Nordic Council of Ministers. One of the aims of the project was to address common challenges in WBL and apprenticeships, and to exchange good practice on quality in WBL.
- A **Western Balkan Alliance for Work-Based Learning** was created in the framework of the Berlin Process (on 18 May 2016) in order to promote greater cooperation between the public and the private sectors. Here the EU countries AT, HR, FR, DE, IT, SI cooperate with Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia.

Building stakeholders' capacity

- **In many countries, stakeholders' capacity is strengthened by 'doing'**, that is, through the day-to-day process of working together to design, implement and evaluate measures under the YG scheme.
- **Some Erasmus+ support targets countries working together in the field of apprenticeships.** For example, in recent years there were three calls for proposals: in 2014, on National Authorities for Apprenticeships, in 2015 on supporting the engagement of SMEs in apprenticeships and in October 2016, a call on VET-Business partnerships in the area of WBL and apprenticeships.

Specific country challenges

- A more detailed overview on country specific challenges can be found in the country fiches for all 28 Member States. In addition, there is a description of the country specific recommendations on youth and progress of implementation (see SWD part 2).

For more information see:

[Press release on the Youth Guarantee and Youth Employment Initiative three years on](#)

[Communication: The Youth Guarantee and Youth Employment Initiative three years on](#)

[SWD: The Youth Guarantee and Youth Employment Initiative three years on](#)

[SWD: The Youth Guarantee and Youth Employment Initiative three years on \(part 2/2\)](#)

[SWD: Applying the Quality Framework for Traineeships](#)