

# Apprenticeships for adults: How can we make apprenticeships a lifelong opportunity?

European Alliance for Apprenticeships (EAfA)

— 15 October 2019

The fourth European Vocational Skills Week took place in Helsinki between 14 and 18 October 2019. This year's focus was on 'VET for All – Skills for Life'. In this context, the European Alliance for Apprenticeships (EAfA) organised a conference to discuss what opportunities apprenticeships can offer to adults, what specific challenges hinder the take-up of adult apprenticeships and what strategies can be put in place to overcome these challenges.

About 300 participants joined the event, including EAfA members, representatives from the European Apprentices Network (EAN) and other participants in the European Vocational Skills Week.

**Joost Korte**, Director-General, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, highlighted that the ongoing digitalisation and innovation process is having an impact on the labour market, which requires more flexibility, upskilling and reskilling. Although apprenticeships have often been seen as an opportunity for young people, they can also be an important resource for adults and part of the solution to the challenges posed by a fast-changing labour market.



*'The European Alliance for Apprenticeship is a project developed without funding, but around and by individuals.'*

**Joost Korte**, Director-General, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion

## WORKSHOPS: HOW TO ADAPT APPRENTICESHIPS TO THE NEEDS OF ADULTS

Conference participants split into three parallel workshops to identify the key elements of adult apprenticeships and formulate recommendations for the future.

What?	Who?	How?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop flexible systems in terms of:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>curricula</li> <li>teaching methods</li> <li>teaching delivery</li> </ul> </li> <li>Foresee the assessment of pre-existing skills and the development of a personalised learning plan</li> <li>Establish incentive schemes to encourage employers to invest into skills development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure that the specific needs of adult learners are taken into account (e.g. child support for parents, financial incentives)</li> <li>Focus on the sectors that are more in need than others (e.g. those at risk due to automation or linked to climate change)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop and effectively communicate what is understood by 'apprenticeships' and 'adult apprenticeships'</li> <li>Ensure that adult apprenticeships are flexible and that sufficient incentives are offered</li> <li>Effectively communicate the need for and the benefits of engaging in apprenticeships</li> </ul>

## THE VIEWS OF THE EUROPEAN SOCIAL PARTNERS

Representatives of the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC), SMEunited and BusinessEurope discussed the key aspects of adult apprenticeships. They stressed the need to assess the pre-existing skills of adult learners, and adapt content and methodologies accordingly. Given that apprenticeships are regarded as a means to address the skills needs of the labour market, involving social partners in the design, development and governance of apprenticeships can further enhance their capacity to develop the right skills set.

## CEDEFOP AND THE OECD WORK ON APPRENTICESHIPS FOR ADULTS

Although there has been a lot of work on apprenticeships, research focused on apprenticeships for adults is limited and the key aspects have yet to be clearly defined. The conference gave **Lidia Salvatore** from Cedefop and **Shinyoung Jeon** from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) the opportunity to present the findings of on-going and recent studies.

According to these studies, there is no agreed definition of apprenticeships for adults. Age 25 is often used as a divide, although it is not a concluding factor and the level of work experience is often more important.

As they are traditionally geared towards young people, apprenticeships tend to be less flexible and less easily accessible for adults. However, the potential of apprenticeships to lead to the acquisition of new skills makes them a perfect instrument to cope with the constant need for workers to upskill and reskill. To encourage adults to participate in apprenticeships, elements of flexibility such as shorter programme lengths and stronger modularity could be introduced, as well as financial incentives for companies.



EaFa welcomed new members from across Europe

## WELCOME FOR NEW EAFA MEMBERS

The event was also an opportunity to welcome 18 new members to the Alliance. On this occasion, EAfA surpassed the symbolic milestone of 300 pledges with a signature from the Association of Virtual and Augmented Reality (AVRAR). EAfA members benefit from the Apprenticeship Support Services (AppSS), which includes online resources and networking opportunities that allow them to connect, learn and act. Find out more [here](#).

## FACE-TO-FACE: INTERGENERATIONAL DIALOGUE

Representatives of EAN and EAfA engaged in a fast-paced exchange of opinions and questions/answers. The apprentices shared their first-hand experiences and their view on the important aspects to consider when developing apprenticeships. On the other side, the EAfA members offered their perspective and sometimes challenged their younger counterparts. The animated dialogue focused on apprentices' salary, working hours and expectations, as well as the personalisation of the learning experience.



EAN apprentices shared their opinions and experiences

## APPRENTICESHIPS FOR ADULTS: GOOD PRACTICES

This session brought together different representatives from key stakeholders to discuss best practice examples in apprenticeships for adults.

- The **Alliance for YOUTH** initiative spearheaded by Nestlé brings together more than 300 companies pledging to offer more than 200,000 jobs and training opportunities by 2020, to encourage the development of apprenticeship schemes, and to organise 'Readiness for work' workshops to help young people preparing for job interviews.
- The **Global Apprenticeship Network** (GAN) aims to 'create an equitable future for all segments of the workforce and a sustainable talent pipeline for business' through a faster uptake of work-based learning by businesses. The network has engaged with more than 300 companies in 16 countries.
- The **EUCEN ApprEnt** project, funded through the Erasmus+ programme, trains 'mentors' to act as facilitators between business and higher education to improve the dialogue between the two stakeholders. Ultimately, the project contributes to the development of better curricula for higher quality apprenticeships.



*'Skills mismatches are an impediment to investment. We can't invest in technology if we don't have the people.'*

**Kathleen Elsig**, Head of Strategic Partnerships and Development, Global Apprenticeship Network

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# Apprenticeships for adults: How to make apprenticeships a lifelong opportunity?

## *European Alliance for Apprenticeships*

*Meeting report*

15 October 2019

## Apprenticeships for adults: How to make apprenticeships a lifelong opportunity?

### European Alliance for Apprenticeships (EAfA)

The event 'Apprenticeships for adults: How to make apprenticeships a lifelong opportunity?', organised by the EAfA, took place in Helsinki as part of the fourth European Vocational Skills Week (EVSW) on 15 October 2019. This year's EVSW focused on 'VET for All – Skills for Life'. In line with the overall topic, the conference discussed how apprenticeships can be relevant to adults and the key aspects that differentiate adult apprenticeships from those designed for a younger target group.

Around 300 delegates participated in the event, including national and European policymakers, young apprentices, representatives from sector organisations, education institutions and businesses and members of the EAfA from across Europe.

The meeting was broadcasted online through different social media channels and promoted through the hashtag [#ApprenEU](#). The recordings from the event are available [here](#).

#### 1.0 Introduction and welcome

The event was opened at Finlandia Hall and moderated by **Progress Works Director, Tamsin Rose**.

In his opening speech, **Joost Korte, Director-General, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion**, first recognised the success of EVSW, highlighting the national, European and international reach of the event. The Director-General then praised the work of the EAfA and the rapid growth it has achieved since 2013: *'it is a project developed without funding, but around and by individuals'*.

Joost Korte set the scene of the conference, explaining that apprenticeships have often been considered to target young people, but they can also be an important resource for adults. However, before opening them up to an older target group, there are several questions that need to be answered such as: How will these opportunities benefit the individual and society? What adult group should be targeted? (migrants, unemployed, people needing upskilling or reskilling) What specific characteristics and settings should these apprenticeships have?

World and labour markets demand continuous upskilling and reskilling. Being flexible and able to adapt to the challenges posed by digitalisation and innovation are requirements to remain competitive globally. Although there are many questions concerning the development of apprenticeships for adults, work-based learning is undoubtedly part of the solution to these challenges.

As the new Commission will soon start its work, there are exciting times ahead: some of the priorities of the new Commission will involve the development of an action plan for the creation of a European pillar of social rights and the implementation of the skills agenda to face skill shortage and unemployment. These priorities are also linked to apprenticeships.

**Virpi Spangar, Chairman, Apprenticeship Experts in Finland Association**, explained that in Finland the majority of apprentices are adults. For example, through apprenticeships, entrepreneurs can acquire skills related to management and

organisation. Adult apprenticeships are integrated in VET, however, the focus is not on the age but on the specific needs of the learners. Through individual learning pathways developed for each student, apprentices of any age can acquire the specific skills required. The key objective of the Finnish system is to develop a modular, flexible system that guarantees a better link between schools, companies and strong employment opportunities.

## 2.0 Panel discussion on apprenticeships for adults: studies and strategies

The purpose of the panel was to hear from key organisations about their work on apprenticeships for adults and the lessons they had learned.

**Lidia Salvatore, Expert, Cedefop**, reported the preliminary results of an ongoing study on apprenticeships for adults Which is the first one on this particular topic. The study aims to explore key questions such as: What does adult apprenticeship mean? What are the characteristics that shape a successful apprenticeship for adults? Do adults have access to apprenticeships? How easy is it for them to participate?

According to the preliminary findings, apprenticeships for adults are not usually considered a separate type of apprenticeship, although 14 countries have developed specific policies on adult apprenticeships. Age is not a concluding factor, it is the amount of work experience that matters more.

The study has also found that in countries where apprenticeships are configured as an independent system and separated from other types of VET, apprenticeships are open to both adults and young people, but are traditionally geared towards young people. As a consequence, they tend to be less flexible and less accessible for adults, hence incentives are used to encourage adults towards the apprenticeships.

In countries where apprenticeships are a way of delivering VET, they share the same qualification and governance. In these cases, apprenticeships are more flexible and require fewer incentives as the apprenticeship itself is an incentive to get a qualification and is seen as an alternative education pathway.

**Shinyoung Jeon, Policy Analyst, OECD** confirmed that there is not an agreed definition of apprenticeships for adults across OECD countries. Age 25 is often used as a divide. In general, in continental Europe, young apprentices are more common than adult apprentices. A relatively larger share of adult apprentices is instead present in northern Europe (Finland, Norway, United Kingdom).

There are three main drivers that push forward the development of adult apprenticeships:

- demographic changes linked to the aging population and migration flow;
- labour market changes due to digitalisation and constant innovation;
- apprenticeships' effectiveness in providing required skills to the market.

There are, however, some constraints to adult apprenticeships. Return on investment from adult apprenticeships is lower than young people apprenticeships due to the higher salaries normally required by older learners, as well as lower mobility.

To encourage adults to participate in apprenticeships, elements of flexibility could be introduced, such as a shorter programme length and stronger modularity. This would also be beneficial for employers as they could take advantage of a more targeted education and the possibility of obtaining the skills required in a shorter period of time.

Finally, adults might consider apprenticeships to pave the way to a career change or because they need to upskill or reskill. In these cases, career guidance could be an important deciding factor for adults to engage in apprenticeships.

Although these elements and strategies could favour the uptake of apprenticeships for adults, there is limited empirical evidence of the impact of governmental efforts to encourage adult apprenticeships.

### 3.0 Best practises for adult apprenticeships

The session brought together different representatives from key stakeholders to discuss best practice examples in apprenticeships for adults:

- **Michiel Kernkamp, CEO, Nestlé Nordic**, presented the Alliance for YOUth initiatives spearheaded by Nestlé. Through this business-driven initiative, Nestlé and 300 other companies have pledged to offer more than 200,000 jobs and training opportunities by 2020, to encourage the development of apprenticeship schemes and to organise 'Readiness for work' workshops to help young people preparing for job interviews.
- **Kathleen Elsig, Head of Strategic Partnerships and Development, Global Apprenticeship Network (GAN)**, presented GAN activities and reach. The network aims to 'create an equitable future for all segments of the workforce and a sustainable talent pipeline for business' through faster uptake of work-based learning by businesses. They have engaged with more than 300 companies in 16 countries. For companies, it is extremely important to foster apprenticeships and work-based learning opportunities to cope with the pace of change in the world: 'Skill mismatch is impediment to investment. We can't invest in technology if we don't have the people'. GAN is currently bringing forward an ongoing global conversation on apprenticeships through the campaign, Skilling Now.
- **Isabell Grundschober, Head of the Centre for Research in Educational Technology, Danube University Krems**, presented the EUCEN's ApprEnt project, aiming to enhance the quality of higher education apprenticeships through better dialogue and understanding between higher education and companies. The project is funded by the Erasmus+ programme and trains mentors to act as facilitators between businesses and higher education. The resulting improved dialogue between the two stakeholders should ultimately contribute to developing better curricula for higher apprenticeships.

### 4.0 The views of European social partners

The session brought together different representatives from key European social partners to discuss apprenticeships for adults:

- **Ludovic Voet, Confederal Secretary, European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC)**, highlighted that although there are common objectives between adult and youth apprenticeships, there are also important aspects to be distinguished, such as wages and social protection. Voet also underlined that apprenticeships can represent an opportunity to foster integration of migrants into the labour market and society.
- **Silke Van den Bogaert, Social Affairs Policy Adviser, SMEUnited**, emphasised that adult apprentices often have previous experience and specific



skills, so companies and VET providers need to consider this and be ready adapt content, structure and methodology of teaching.

- **Robert Plummer, Senior Adviser, BusinessEurope**, also highlighted the need to review teaching methods used for adult apprenticeships. For adult apprentices, it might be more important to focus on hard skills linked to the job position and less on soft transversal skills that should have been acquired already. It is also important to review how we communicate and discuss apprenticeships, which could change the general perception that apprenticeships are a prerogative of younger people.

The three representatives agreed that it is fundamental to involve social partners in the development and governance of apprenticeships. Their involvement can guarantee both the quality of apprenticeships and improved alignment with market needs.

## 5.0 Face-to-face: intergenerational dialogue

Aiming to leverage the experience of young apprentices, this session involved a conversation between members of the **European Apprentices Network (EAN)** and members of the **European Alliance for Apprenticeships**.

The apprentices shared their first-hand experience of apprenticeships and their views on important aspects to consider when developing them. The EAfA members also offered their perspective, at times challenging their younger counterparts. The animated dialogue focused on apprentice salaries, working hours, expectations from apprenticeships and personalisation of the learning experience.

## 6.0 EAfA Newcomer Ceremony

**Norbert Schöbel, Team Leader**, and **Dana-Carmen Bachmann, Head of Unit, European Commission, Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion**, welcomed the 18 new EAfA members:

- **Air Liquide** - Christophe Chalié, Vice-President HR Europe Industries
- **APETEC** - Vitor Alhandra, Vice-President
- **Audencia** - Frédérique Orpen, Head of Foreign Languages and ICT in Education
- **AVRAR** - Martin Kotek, President
- **C.I.F.P. Professor Raúl Vázquez** - Carmen Santamaría Estefanía, Director
- **Central Bohemia Region** - Jaroslava Pokorná Jermanová, Governor of the Central Bohemia Region
- **City Council of Alzira** - Carmen Herrero Pardo, Head of Unit
- **College ten Doorn** - Lieven Cauwels, Coordinator
- **Deusto University** - Ana Mendibil, International Internships and I-Dual Coordinator
- **Fundació Catalana de l'Esplai (Fundesplai)** - Sergi Alegre Calero, Head of International Projects
- **Glocal Srl** - Silvano Del Duca, General Administrator
- **IES Emilio Canalejo Olmeda (Montilla)** - Juan José Gallego Martínez, Project Coordinator
- **IHK-Projektgesellschaft mbH** - Daniel Klee, Representative for the Development and Implementation of Foreign Activities

- **Institut Don Bosco Val d'Or** - Jean-Marc Brasseur, European Project Coordinator
- **IT VET school Smichov** - Radko Sáblík, Director
- **Limerick and Clare Education and Training Board** - Paul Patton, Director of Further Education and Training
- **Island Panorama Centre** - Akeem Cujo Oppong, Director
- **Swedish National Agency for Apprenticeship (Skolverket)** - Lotta Naglitsch, Director of Education.

On this occasion, EAfA surpassed the symbolic milestone of 300 pledges with a signature from the Association of Virtual and Augmented Reality (AVRAR).

### 7.0 Three parallel workshops: How to adapt apprenticeships to the needs of adults, with key recommendations for the future

The last session engaged all conference participants in three parallel workshops to identify the key aspects of adult apprenticeships and formulate recommendations for the future. The discussion focused on three main questions:

- **What should we do?** Participants identified the need to develop a flexible system in terms of curricula (e.g. developed in modules), teaching methods, time and space (e.g. learning from home) to accommodate different learning needs (e.g. using individual pathways). It is important to assess the skill level and develop a personalised learning plan. However, this flexibility should not compromise the harmonisation of learning outcomes. Finally, incentive schemes should encourage employers to invest in the development of skills.
- **For whom?** Participants found it difficult to decide on a target group as there are many potential options, such as :
  - employed
  - unemployed
  - people looking for reskilling/a career change/progress in their career
  - migrants
  - low-qualified
  - highly-qualified.

In any case, the specific needs of adult learners should be considered. For example, the provision of childcare could help parents allocating time to their professional development.

Ultimately, lifelong learning is critical across all ages and sectors. There might be sectors more in need (e.g. sectors more at risk due to automation or climate change).

**How?** Participants agreed that the key word is 'flexibility'. The system should be competence-driven and not time-driven. There is still a lack of common understanding on what apprenticeship precisely means which needs to be addressed when discussing flexible approaches.



