



Get Together: European Alliance for Apprenticeships (EAfA) event

Meeting report

13 February 2020



“Get Together!”: A European Alliance for Apprenticeships (EAfA) event

The event ‘Get Together!’ organised by the European Commission on 13 February 2020 took place in Brussels with the focus on EAfA members. This was the first event of 2020, and the 25th EAfA meeting to date, and it strongly emphasised the exchange of information between EAfA members. The event included a mixture of presentations and panel discussions on the key topics and sharing of good practices, along with interactive workshops to further inform and develop the approach to implementation of the European Alliance for Apprenticeship.

Live updates were provided throughout the day on the designated EAfA LinkedIn group, with the content from throughout the day available [here](#). The presentations and the pictures from the event are available [here](#).

1.0 Introduction and welcome

The event was opened by **Norbert Schöbel, Team Leader, DG EMPL, European Commission** who welcomed the participants and briefly introduced the agenda. He highlighted the role of EAfA members in shaping the event and the topics of discussion. The roadmap for 2020 was presented, highlighting the upcoming EAfA events in Spain, Turkey, Ireland, Serbia and Germany¹. Notably, it was mentioned that this year the European Commission, in cooperation with *Cittá Metropolitana di Roma Capitale*, is launching a new initiative at its event in Rome, the European Network of Cities for Apprenticeship, with the aim to raise awareness on the role of the cities in supporting apprenticeships and to create a new advocacy platform.

Tamás Varnai, DG EMPL, European Commission briefly highlighted the progress being made on the benchlearning element of the Apprenticeship Support Services. Four pilot countries (Belgium-NL, Belgium-FR, Greece, Malta and Romania) are participating in the first cycle and are currently conducting the self-assessment of their apprenticeship systems. The first country visits are expected this summer.

The introductory remark was also an opportunity to present the **SELFIE²** tool, an EU action under the Digital Education Action Plan. The tool is a free, easy to use and customisable self-reflection tool, allowing schools to assess where they stand with school- and work-based learning in the digital age.

2.0 Panel discussion on equality and apprenticeships

The first panel addressed the broad question of equality and apprenticeships, the links between them and how they could be mutually strengthened. The panel was moderated by **Ann Vanden Bulcke, DG EMPL, European Commission**, who introduced the topic by touching upon common misconceptions occurring when discussing equality, equity and inclusion. She subsequently introduced the panel speakers who discussed issues of inclusion and equality in relation to different target groups.

- **Callum Grigor, Senior Apprenticeship Policy Manager at the Scottish Government** presented the topic of **Gender Segregation and retention in Construction Industries in Scotland**, where the percentage of female apprentices is around 2%. He presented different government-led initiatives

¹ This meeting will fall under the European Vocational Skills Week of 2020.

² https://ec.europa.eu/education/schools-go-digital_en

tackling gender disparity, such as the Equality Action Plan for Apprenticeships. Moreover, he highlighted the work of the Scottish Apprenticeship Advisory Boards to address under-representation in apprenticeships and support better access to and participation in apprenticeships, and the Gender Commission set up in response to findings by the SAAB Group Board. Together, these efforts aim to provide recommendations and support with business-ready practical solutions to employers that can help address the barriers to improving gender balance in the workforce.

- **Maria Manuel Casal Ribeiro, International Internships Coordinator and Trainer at Câmara Municipal de Lisboa** presented the strategies developed to strengthen the inclusion of migrants and refugees at local level. The city of Lisbon's ethnic diversity poses both challenges and opportunities in facilitating learning and employment opportunities for its citizens. The city strategy is based on lifelong learning which allows refugees and migrants to attain compulsory education level. The city has participated in Erasmus+ projects with the objectives to build motivation, digital and language skills of adult migrants and support their social inclusion.
- **Amana Ferro, Senior Policy Adviser at the European Roma Grassroots Organisations (ERGO) Network** outlined common barriers faced by vulnerable groups on the labour market, particularly by Roma jobseekers. She highlighted the benefits of diverse and multicultural labour force, including the increase of workers' emotional intelligence, broadening of the client base and the rise of economic productivity. As an example of good practice, she mentioned the campaign on inclusive work places named "Place For All - Campaign On Inclusive Work Places³". Through this campaign, employers can receive the 'Place for All' badge, showcasing that they are committed to diversity and inclusion in their workplace.
- **Akeem Cujo Oppong, Director of the Island Panorama Centre** introduced the Icelandic approach to accessibility and inclusion of people with disabilities. In Iceland, such policies are under the jurisdiction of municipalities which have agreements with various employers and educational institutions. In that sense, people with disabilities can become part-time apprentices or enrol in courses tailored to their needs. The Icelandic approach follows the theory of gentle teaching where the focus is always on empowering the individuals and not reducing their rights to choose and be independent.

3.0 Panel discussion on apprenticeships of the future

The second panel presented how apprenticeships should respond to developments on the labour market and the increasing requirements for new skills. It was moderated by **Per Nordmark, EARLALL**, a European-wide network of regions contributing to EU policymaking and cooperating in projects in the field of lifelong learning.

- **Arja Krauchenberg, Vice-President of the Lifelong Learning Platform (LLL)** discussed the types of skills which will be needed for the future. She emphasised the lifelong learning approach to personal development founded on the combination of life, basic and professional skills rather than solely focusing on employability. Related to new developments, some schools have been introducing a subject on "how to learn" which will become increasingly important in the context of constantly changing skills. Creativity and dedication are also skills which the future workforce will need. She concluded that there are many ongoing discussions on the benefits and disadvantages of digital skills, particularly at a younger age, and more evidence is needed to know

³ <http://ergonetwork.org/employment/>

when to start teaching those skills to younger pupils. The successful application of digital skills is closely linked with learners' fundamental basic skills.

- **Vitor Alhandra, Vice-President of APETEC** presented how **artificial intelligence (AI)** can be used for teaching and learning purposes, especially through e-learning (use of electronic resources to educational purposes) and b-learning (blended learning combining online educational opportunities and traditional methods). One of the key potential strengths of AI is seen in its ability to evaluate and assess individuals' learning process and tailor it to learners' needs.
- **Irvine Abraham, Enterprise & International Manager at the Northern Regional College** spoke about the need to consider **self-employed apprenticeships' model and pathways** in the context of the changing landscape of apprenticeships. He stated that the mentor-apprentice dependency model becoming less relevant and that there is a rise in self-employment in the creative sector and in particular the context of Industry 4.0. In schools, more and more classes are being implemented online, while the tutors have more of a supportive than a teaching role. The education delivery is increasingly focused on holistic learning and is moving away from traditional learning classroom sessions.

Concluding the panel, Per Nordmark emphasised the need to learn how to use the new tools efficiently which will allow us to better deliver educational and training programmes and define further the future skills needs.

4.0 Intervention by the European Apprentices Network

The European Apprentices Network (EAN) gathers apprentices at European level to ensure that their voice is heard in discussions on VET and apprenticeships. **Adam Skokan, Leonardo Miodrag and Matthäus Fandrejewski**, members of EAN, presented the network's activities and highlighted its importance for personal and apprenticeship development. The EAN is also actively looking for new members with the latest calls open until 19 February 2020.

Norbert Schöbel complemented the presentation by mentioning the advantages of having national apprenticeship representation organisations in the EAN Steering Committee, in addition to individual and European members.

5.0 Presentation on higher education and apprenticeships

Tamás Varnai gave a short introduction on the importance of the growing links between higher education and apprenticeships and introduced the speakers.

- **Lucília Santos, Associate Professor from the European University Continuing Education Network** delivered her presentation on the links between universities and businesses through a video recording. The links are usually built around internships (but rarely apprenticeships) degree-related projects, or tailor-made training sessions. The Erasmus+ project ApprEnt aims to bring closer the dimensions of education and business, enhancing partnerships that involve companies, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), VET providers etc. She concluded that a new and improved concept of partnerships between HE and businesses is needed to increase apprenticeships and work-based learning schemes, strengthen and expand VET and Professional and Higher Education CE/LLL/CPD activities.
- **Alicia-Leonor Sauli-Miklavčič, Board Member of the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE)** explained the concept of professional higher education, which integrates higher education

and the world of work and has a more practical perspective (e.g. student thesis addressing a real company's problem). EURASHE is active in the field of bringing together the three main stakeholders in the field: students, employers and education providers. To meet that end, they have developed several tools, including the Apprenticeship Quality Toolkit⁴, with the specific objective of helping SMEs to develop quality apprenticeships.

6.0 Summaries of parallel workshops

Participants had the opportunity to attend one of the three parallel workshops on varying topics. All sessions included an expert presentation followed by interactive round table discussions. Some of the key outcomes of the discussions are presented below.

- Workshop A focused on manners in which to **strengthen the image of apprenticeships** and **role of parents** in that process. The presentation was delivered by **Claudio Masotti, Vice-President, European Parents' Association**. In the post-presentation discussion, workshop participants came up with the following tools aimed to reinforce the positive image of apprenticeships:
 - The importance of early engagement and the importance of celebrating success through peer-to-peer communication such as student testimonials published as videos and articles; open school days, student participation in competitions, awards etc. The desired strategy is to reach into schools and demonstrate to students how they could profit from the apprenticeship experience.
 - Offering flexible, agile, dynamic apprenticeship opportunities according to young people's expectations and today's needs. One example is *hop on / hop off* apprenticeships in Finland.
 - Bringing on board the new sectors which do not have experience with old apprenticeship models, but which need the young labour force, such as the cybersecurity, IT sector etc.
- Through **Workshop B on the recognition of qualifications** participants were given a better understanding of the European qualification recognition landscape. **Elisabeth Thienemann, EU Policy Officer, EuropeActive** presented her experiences in working on the recognition of sectoral, national and international qualifications in the sports and fitness sector. Some of the main observations and remarks following the round table discussions are presented below:
 - It is easier to streamline qualifications if there is a strong institutional framework in place with a tradition of strong social dialogue. Social partner involvement was considered important as it brings together employers, trade unions and teachers/trainers allowing for joint action to be taken. Less developed VET systems struggle in this respect.
 - Another challenge is the variation across the EU in relation to the level of competency. In some countries VET is a national competence, while in others regional bodies play a more central role.
 - Engaging employers remains an issue for VET providers and it was suggested organising workshops to open discussions with employers could be considered.
 - The European Ambassadors Programme and the EU Sectoral Blueprint were considered as the examples of good practices.

⁴ <https://www.eurashe.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/ApprenticeshipQualityToolkit.pdf>

- In **Workshop C**, the participants explored possible paths to address the **new and future skills demands** according to the changing labour market settings. **Arja Krauchenberg, Vice President, LLLP Lifelong Learning** introduced the topic to participants and her experience, particularly in cross cutting issues such as social inclusion, validation and learning mobility. Some of the main observations by participants were the following:
 - It is important to continue the public-private partnership reinforcement between companies, education institutions, VET providers, policy makers, etc. This could support skills development and dual learning programmes that align to the needs of the labour market.
 - Skills forecasting is becoming increasingly difficult due to rapid technological advancements and HE apprenticeships programmes are a powerful tool to support the up-skilling and re-skilling process. At the same time, upskilling needs to go beyond traditional education systems and take into account training of workers. In addition, socio-economic national and regional aspects should be acknowledged, and dual systems adapted to these particularities.
 - This process needs to be supported by mentality change. The public sector has an important role in providing information to parents, teachers and students about needs of educational system capacity. More efforts are needed in career guidance, i.e. better communication on the benefits of apprenticeships through storytelling to change parents' attitudes. In sum, participants agreed skills development in apprenticeships should be seen as a co-creation process.

7.0 Welcoming of new EAfA members

Norbert Schöbel welcomed **five** new members to the Alliance:

- **Accademia Europea di Firenze** (Italy) received by Simone Falchi;
- **Agenzia per la Formazione, l'Orientamento e il Lavoro della Provincia di Como** (Italy) Cinzia Dalla Riva and Chiara Colombo;
- **Confederación Sindical Independiente – Fetico** (Spain) received by Emilia Martin;
- **EBA - Formação Profissional, LDA** – (Portugal), Pedro Dias.
- **Serdar Plastik Industry and Co. Inc** (Turkey) received by Özlem Ünlü.

8.0 Closing remarks

Norbert Schöbel closed the event by stressing the importance of inclusion and empowerment, which represent constant issues in our daily combats against the stereotypes and discrimination and should lead to more diverse work environments. He also highlighted the points raised during the Panel on the future of skills and how apprenticeships should respond to this new reality. This is also something the Commission has acknowledged and will launch an updated New Skills Agenda at the 2020 European Vocational Skills Week, focused on upskilling and reskilling of the labour force.