

Technology empowering new forms of Work-Based Learning

European Alliance for Apprenticeships (EAfA) – 1st Live Discussion

— 14 May 2020



The first ever EAfA Online Live Discussion took place on 14 May 2020. The discussion was moderated by expert Andrew McCoshan and brought together six speakers, representing a broad range of stakeholders, to discuss how the VET sector is adapting its educational offer to the

challenges brought by the COVID-19 crisis. Indeed, social distancing measures have obliged VET providers and companies to develop innovative solutions to ensure the continuity of quality training. While the rapid introduction of digital solutions poses some challenges, it also opens up new opportunities for a broader provision of remote learning in the future.

PANEL

Dana-Carmen Bachmann
Head of Unit, DG EMPL

Charlie James
European Apprentices Network

Barbara Ofstad
Head of Siemens
Professional Education Germany

Juliet Desmet and Joke Van Gheluwe
IMEC Smart Education @ Schools

Theresa Feidl
Vice President Professional Training Policy
and HR Cooperations
Munich Airport

"The place of Education and Training in the recovery strategy of Member States cannot be forgotten. Member States should see this pandemic as a catalyst for more investment in digital learning tools, in more equipment and training for teachers, trainers and students and in how to transfer more good practices to the mainstream."

Dana-Carmen Bachmann

PERSPECTIVES ON THE IMPACT OF COVID-19

The discussion was opened by **Dana Bachmann**, who highlighted the importance of the values of sharing, solidarity and working together for a common cause, which are at the heart of the EU response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Commission has been mobilising all available resources to help Member-States manage this crisis, utilising them with increased flexibility under the Corona Response Investment Initiative and launching a European instrument for temporary support to mitigate unemployment risks in an emergency (SURE). The Commission also has carried out a survey towards policy makers and VET providers, mapping responses to the crisis. Some inspiring examples also came up, such as initiatives to preserve full salaries and social protection for apprentices. Dana also mentioned that the Commission is currently preparing a set of proposals for revising the future MFF instruments and lining up additional funds for supporting economic recovery and the key role of VET will play in the green and digital transition.

"COVID-19, as bitter and as dramatic as it was, has been a true catalyst for digital learning in VET for Siemens."

Barbara Ofstad

Barbara Ofstad and Theresa Feidl highlighted the many challenges that companies face in ensuring continuous quality training and support for their apprentices during the current crisis. The crisis has taken many companies by surprise, and many of them have had to reorganise their in-house training systems in order to allow their apprentices to continue their training from home.

"Researching and working on the implementation of remote learning tools together with the training staff and the apprentices was a very beneficial experience for my company and for the apprentices as a whole. It was a mutual learning opportunity that we will all benefit from in the future."

Theresa Feidl

Charlie James stressed the emotional and financial challenges faced by many apprentices due to the impact of the pandemic on apprenticeships. Many have found themselves in limbo, not being able to complete their courses and also not receiving adequate pay during this period. The pandemic has highlighted the limits of the existing support system for apprentices, from the lack of access to mental health support to limitations in terms of internet access and compatible devices.



European
Commission

BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES OF REMOTE LEARNING

The current pandemic has been considered an opportunity to further expand experimentation with new learning methods, such as remote learning and gamification, which are seen as potentially more fun and popular than traditional VET methods. The experiences of **Siemens and Munich Airport** have shown that VET learners tend to engage more with training that entails quizzes, micro-learning and simulations. Before the pandemic began, Siemens had already been successfully experimenting with remote learning tools, including an internal virtual training platform called 'MyLearningWorld' and virtual simulations for the training of professional train conductors and welders. Munich Airport reorganised their network of 230 staff members responsible for on-site training to start providing online courses, so that their apprentices could maintain their skills and prepare to pass their final examinations in July.

Juliet Desmet and Joke Van Gheluwe remarked that each remote learning tool comes with different costs and benefits for both VET providers and apprentices that need to be considered. Virtual Reality (VR), for example, might have initial development costs, but provides substantial savings on training materials, safety equipment and maintenance. At the same time, VR offers an unlimited supply of materials and situations in which to train, allowing providers to prepare apprentices for a wider range of scenarios than is normally possible when relying on traditional methods. Apprentices have total freedom to make mistakes, make their own decisions and to learn from their choices. Studies also show that apprentices can easily reproduce what they have learned in a virtual environment in real-life situations. Nonetheless, there are still many barriers to allowing broader adoption of VR among VET providers, particularly the cost of the systems (i.e. hardware requirements, server costs, etc.) and the technical hurdles that teachers and trainers need to overcome in order to use the system to its full potential.

"Gamifying learning is so important. Apprentices and learners are in an age in which they love instant feedback, and to feel more ownership of what they learn and when they learn it."

Charlie James

"There are positive effects of using VR to motivate students. In the real world, teachers are saying to students, 'don't do this, don't do that' to protect the safety of the learners. In VR, there is no need to say this; students can make mistakes and are free to make their own decisions and learn from them."

Juliet Desmet and Joke Van Gheluwe

MAKING REMOTE LEARNING IN VET A REALITY

The future looks bright for remote learning in VET, but our speakers agreed that it is not that easy for VET providers to adapt to these new learning methods. Here are some practical tips from our speakers on how to successfully implement remote learning in your organisation.

- **Set up multiple communication tools for apprentices**
Set up phone and video calls, e-mail, Tik Tok, Instagram, etc.
- **Promote the ownership of learning process by the apprentices**
Use micro-learning techniques or blended learning in your training, set tasks for the day and then re-group
- **Assess what the most adapted tools are for your training and for your staff**
Existing tools such as SELFIE can help you evaluate the digital readiness of your organisation
- **Provide apprentices with support systems**
Create spaces for 1-1 and full class interaction
- **Use and adapt a wide range of tools and resources of your trainings**
Retain the interest and motivation of apprentices/staff by varying your online learning resources
- **Co-create trainings with your apprentices**
Adapt your online training systems to the needs of the apprentices and trainers
- **Record the lessons**
Pre-record or upload live lessons for access anytime
- **Put the wellbeing of apprentices/staff at the heart of your strategy**
Create spaces for collaboration, chat and support for staff and apprentices, providing them with materials/support if needed

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