



# Live Discussion: What does quality mean in practice? Integrating the apprentice's perspective

European Alliance for Apprenticeships (EAfA) | 11 February 2021

The third online event of the year held by the European Commission's European Alliance for Apprenticeships (EAfA) explored how the concept of 'quality apprenticeships' is perceived by VET-stakeholders, and highlighted the importance of the apprentice's perspective. The Live Discussion gathered a broad panel of representatives from VET providers and small and large companies, as well as apprentices themselves, to share their perspectives and experiences with the audience.

## INTRODUCTION BY THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION, DG EMPL

**Tamas Varnai**, VET and Apprenticeships Policy Officer for the European Commission (DG EMPL), opened up the floor by discussing the importance of quality in apprenticeships, and explaining how the Council Recommendation on a *European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships* set out 14 criteria for quality apprenticeships.

Tamas also highlighted the important role that the relaunched EAfA plays, together with its members, in delivering this Framework by committing them to improving and raising the standards for apprenticeships. According to the latest data, the objective of most EAfA pledges is to ensure the quality of apprenticeships.

The Commission is also currently preparing a report on implementation of the Framework in the Member States three years after its adoption. Looking ahead, the audience of the Live Discussion was invited to the Joint EAfA-ILO High-level conference (15–16 March), which will offer a European, as well as international, view of setting quality standards for apprenticeships.



'In the past ten years there has been tremendous progress in promoting apprenticeships as an excellent tool for labour market transitions. Today, there is a broad understanding of the usefulness of quality apprenticeships throughout Member States.'

**Tamas Varnai**, VET and Apprenticeships Policy Officer, European Commission (DG EMPL)

## VIEWS ON QUALITY IN APPRENTICESHIPS

Kicking off the live discussion, **Juliana Laskowski**, a representative from the European Apprentices Network (EAN), highlighted the significance of apprenticeships as a first step in starting a professional career, and illustrated various dimensions of quality apprenticeships including a permanent work contract, international certification, and a satisfying and fulfilling job. **Kara Keenaghan**, Apprentice Manager at ESB Networks Training Centre, drew attention to two key aspects of quality in apprenticeships; technical skills and qualifications that are easily measured, and the personal and professional development of apprentices, which is an increasingly crucial factor, albeit more difficult to measure and ensure.

**Tadej Gartner**, a teacher and International Project Coordinator at the Šolski center Škofja Loka, offered an overview of the vocational education and training available in Slovenia at the upper secondary level of education, and shared examples from the reintroduction of apprenticeship schemes in the country after almost 40 years without them.

**Maria Angeles Ruiz Gámez**, Director of ESMOVIA, stressed that sufficiently preparing students and providing a defined learning plan and certification which meets the needs of the main actors involved (the student, VET provider and company) are essential components for quality apprenticeships.

## CHALLENGES IN IMPLEMENTING QUALITY IN APPRENTICESHIPS



*A virtual group photo of the panellists.*

*From the top left: **Maria Angeles Ruiz Gámez** and **Tadej Gartner***

*From the bottom left: **Kara Keenaghan** and **Juliana Laskowski***

**Juliana Laskowski** started by highlighting the importance of ensuring a stimulating and rewarding work environment for apprentices where they are valued by the company both during and after their apprenticeship. **Kara Keenaghan** explained that, while enhancing the image of apprenticeships remains a challenge, for a significant number of young people apprenticeships are no longer a second but rather a first career choice. **Tadej Gartner** shared that this was not the case in Slovenia, and that it was a challenge to motivate primary school students to become apprentices. Tadej also highlighted international mobility as an essential tool for promoting apprenticeships as a first-choice educational path. **Maria Angeles Ruiz Gámez** echoed the importance of student mobility, adding that apprenticeships can also act as a tool for improving society by including vulnerable groups such as migrants, refugees, and people with disabilities.

Following the Live Discussion, a Q&A was held where the audience had an opportunity to ask the panellists questions. Among other topics, the green and digital transitions were discussed. **Kara Keenaghan** highlighted how her company was at the forefront of the green wave and how apprentices are equipped with skills required for the next generation of clean technology. **Tadej Gartner** revealed his school's plan to participate in international projects on digital transformation, and how these new areas of knowledge will be seamlessly integrated in the school curricula.

**Juliana Laskowski** shared her experience of how the pandemic has forced companies and VET-providers to embrace digitalisation, and stressed the importance of being given access to proper digital equipment as an apprentice. Finally, responding to a question about apprentices' age as a factor in apprenticeship programmes, **Maria Angeles Ruiz Gámez** explained that adult apprentices are regarded as truly valuable since they bring sought-after experience and motivation to the workplace.

## UPCOMING EVENTS

After all the panellists had spoken and the Live Discussion had been concluded, the audience was cordially invited to the following upcoming EAfA events:

- **23 February:** Webinar on national financing systems and differences in apprentices' pay
- **26 February:** Online training on the involvement of social partners at different stages of apprenticeships
- **15–16 March:** Joint EAfA-ILO High-level conference: Quality and Effective Apprenticeships (EU) and International Labour Standards on Apprenticeships (ILO)

Find more information about the event [here](#)

Join our LinkedIn group [here](#)

# #ApprenEU

Sign up to receive our quarterly EAfA newsletter:

For EAfA members only [here](#)

For non-EAfa members [here](#)