



Live Discussion: How can employers be encouraged to establish apprenticeships? Understanding the barriers to implementation in SMEs

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The 8th Live Discussion hosted by the European Commission's European Alliance for Apprenticeships (EAfA) explored how employers can be encouraged to establish apprenticeships and what the barriers to implementation in SMEs are. The webstreamed event gathered a broad audience including representatives of public authorities, social partners, cross-industry and sectoral organisations and training providers, and, naturally, employers themselves.

INTRODUCTION BY THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION, DG EMPL

Norbert Schöbel, Team Leader of Vocational Education and Training, Apprenticeships and Adult Learning at DG EMPL, opened the event by highlighting the important role of SMEs in the European economy and how the COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted them. In this context apprenticeships represent an opportunity to help SMEs re-establish themselves, contribute to Europe's economy and employ young people. At EU-level, one of EAfA's six priorities is to provide a stable supply of quality and effective apprenticeships. Financial support to SMEs has also been proposed within the Next Generation EU recovery plan and the EU's long-term budget. The support includes remuneration, recruitment bonuses, and temporary social contributions coverage. At the same time it will be important to give non-financial support for SMEs to establish apprenticeship schemes, such as easing administrative burdens and making apprenticeship agreements more flexible for employers.



'Employers are in the driver's seat to make apprenticeships happen. In particular to SMEs, apprenticeships will be essential to business and economic recovery – both now and in a better future.'

Norbert Schöbel, Team Leader, Vocational Education and Training, Apprenticeships and Adult Learning, DG EMPL, European Commission

HOW CAN EMPLOYERS BE ENCOURAGED TO ESTABLISH APPRENTICESHIP SCHEMES?

Kicking off the Live Discussion, **Dominik Jenewein**, Managing Director of the furniture manufacturer JEWa, member of the Austrian Economic Chamber (WKO) and spokesman for the Tyrolean Junge Wirtschaft (Young Economy), drew attention to the benefits of apprenticeships for employers. Clear benefits included the opportunity to quickly train staff according to specific company needs and giving young people practical work experience. From an employer's point of view, apprenticeships need to be a financially viable option while they must also be considered a valued career path from the student's perspective. In addition, specialised VET-training institutions play an essential role in teaching a wider set of skills that may be difficult to obtain at one workplace. **Ildikó Pataki**, Education Policy Advisor for the Municipality of Reșița, Romania and the Re-Edu Smart initiative, shared how investing in apprenticeships is part of a comprehensive revitalisation plan to make her municipality more attractive for investors and residents. The municipality provides support for local employers by meeting the apprentices' living costs, including expenses related to commuting, accommodation and

meals. As a next step, the municipality plans to leverage EU funding in order to establish a local VET competency centre that will help to equip apprentices, and employers, with the technical skills and competences needed for the future. **Mirjam van den Broek**, Senior Policy Advisor at MBO Raad, the association for vocational education institutions in the Netherlands, examined how the COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted the Dutch dual VET system. As part of a national action plan, SMEs are supported in establishing new apprenticeships or maintaining the supply of placements at pre-crisis levels. The role of employers has also been made more flexible by allowing apprenticeships to take place at different workplaces and by increasing the proportion of school-based learning. **Silvia Miro**, Training and Employment Director of Pimec, Catalonia, Spain, emphasised how apprenticeships offer employers an excellent opportunity to obtain qualified staff and to foster a training culture in the company. Consequently, apprenticeships represent a pathway for SMEs to boost their competitiveness and incorporate new skills required within their sector. Important reasons why SMEs, especially smaller ones, tend to be less prone to establishing apprenticeships, are a lack of knowledge about the dual-VET system and a lack of resources to meet its requirements.



‘In the Dutch context, I think we have found a ‘magic formula’ by which we bring together VET providers and social partners around the same table in order to address demands at local, regional and national level.’

Mirjam van den Broek, Senior Policy Advisor, MBO Raad

CHALLENGES FOR EMPLOYERS IN IMPLEMENTING APPRENTICESHIPS, AND LESSONS LEARNED ON COLLABORATION BETWEEN STAKEHOLDERS

Ildikó Pataki described the broader challenges facing SMEs in Reșița, including competition from larger companies, not finding the right type of skills and qualifications, and having an aging workforce. It was in this context that the Municipality of Reșița had sought to support employers to establish apprenticeships to enhance local competitiveness by integrating younger people into companies and tapping into the knowledge of education providers. **Mirjam van den Broek** explained that the Dutch government has provided funding to help address challenges arising from the pandemic, and that employers are supported through tax relief, online coaching, and guidance on working from home. **Silvia Miro** highlighted that the Catalanian dual-VET system, having started in 2012, is still in its early stages and that many employers still do not know about the opportunities it offers. To enable SME participation, raising awareness of the new system is a priority, and an in-company mentor programme has been launched to serve as a support structure and a gateway to set up apprenticeship schemes. **Dominik Jenewein** explained that apprenticeship schemes in Austria, as in many other countries, can struggle to attract young people and emphasised the need for more promotion



A virtual group photo of the panellists and the moderator.

From the top left: **Jeff Bridgford** (moderator), **Dominik Jenewein**, **Silvia Miro**, **Mirjam van den Broek**, **Ildikó Pataki**

What’s next?

After hearing the panellists and the conclusion of the Live Discussion, the audience was cordially invited to the high-level conference on the ‘*Role of the regions and cities in delivering high-quality apprenticeships for all*’, taking place 3–4 June. Finally, audience members were asked to check out the brand new EAFA training module ‘[Going Digital in Apprenticeships](#)’.

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