



European
Commission



The voice of apprentices in the European Year of Youth

24-25 March 2022

Meeting report

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1.0. Introduction

1.1. Background

The European Alliance for Apprenticeships (EAfA), in collaboration with the Directorate General for Vocational Education and Training of the Regional Government of Catalonia, the Fundación Bertelsmann and the European Apprenticeships Network (EAN), organised a high-level event on 24 and 25 March 2022. This event brought together all relevant stakeholders from across Europe to discuss the learners' roles and perspective in apprenticeships, and to hear from different apprentices' experiences across Europe.

By declaring 2022 the European Year of Youth, the European Union (EU) aims to put the spotlight on young people, the challenges they are facing and the strength they are demonstrating to overcome challenges. The EU will stimulate action from all stakeholders to provide more and better opportunities in the future. High quality apprenticeships can play an important role in providing youth with the skills they need to be successful and access quality employment opportunities.

The event focused on the role of apprentices and their representation across the EU. During the two-day event, participants heard about the EAN and its contribution to the 2022 European Year of Youth. The main objectives of the event were:

Official launch of the renewed EAN

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the network has not yet had the opportunity to meet physically. This event will be an opportunity to not only meet, but to officially launch, the renewed EAN. During the event, participants will hear about the EAN and its contribution to the 2022 European Year of Youth.

Awareness raising on apprentices' representation

During the event, examples of good practices concerning apprentices' representation in national and regional structures will be presented with the aim to encourage member states, regions, social partners and youth organisations to address the issue.

Discussion on how to increase apprenticeships' attractiveness

Topics such as how to make apprenticeships more attractive for young people will also be addressed during the meeting. The event will provide insights into Spanish efforts to promote dual VET and include site visits providing participants with the opportunity to exchange information with local VET institutions with identified good practices.

2.0. Day 1

2.1. Welcome session

Setting the scene for the first day of the high-level conference, Mr Matthäus Fandrejewski, representing EAN, welcomed the participants present in Barcelona and those watching online to the first hybrid event since 2020. He invited the first speakers to provide a short introduction and welcome speech.



Speakers:

- **Mr Angel Luis Miguel**, Directorate General for Vocational Education and Training of the Regional Government of Catalonia
- **Ms Clara Bassols**, Director, Bertelsmann Foundation
- **Mr John Fortune**, Member of the European Apprentices Network, USI Vice-President Southern Region, Ireland

2.1.1. Regional dual system in Catalunya

The dual vocational education and training programmes were developed in Catalunya in 2012 after the adoption of a law organising dual system training. A first class produced over 400 graduates, whilst in the last school year 741 students from 317 different schools participated in programmes implemented in partnership with over 3 000 businesses. The dual system witnessed a significant increase with over 81 % of vocational training being in dual vocational training. The levels of satisfaction were also very high among both students and businesses.

Qualitative elements have been introduced to further develop professional training. All training hours are paid and there is close monitoring and collaboration between employers and schools. A team of supervisors help to address the needs of different schools and formalise the collaboration between school and providers as well as improve the relationship between businesses and schools. The role of a joint supervisor has also been introduced in the apprenticeships taking place in foreign businesses.

Placing students' opinions and rights at the centre of dual VET is crucial for the development of the system. Equally important is tailoring the curricular model to the needs of the students. A positive example of the dual system in Catalunya is the presence of all stakeholders in the dual VET system that are working to enhance the quality and image of apprenticeships.

2.1.2. High quality apprenticeships in Spain

In 2015, Fundación Bertelsmann in partnership with other key stakeholders created Alianza FP Dual, a network of companies, VET providers and other organisations committed to high quality apprenticeships in Spain. The alliance, which has reached now 1 500 members, is working on important topics such as increasing the attractiveness of apprenticeships to young people, supporting companies and strengthening collaboration.

To address the gap in the representation of apprentices in decision-making, Alianza FP Dual with Lidl and the Spanish Chamber of Commerce, developed a network of apprentices and former apprentices called, Somos FP dual. The network provides input based on their own experiences in order to improve apprenticeships. The network is also aiming to break down stereotypes around VET programmes, which can provide the best prospects in the labour market, but are not well known or valued among young people. This is very relevant in a country like Spain where the rate of youth unemployment is high.

Another important objective of Alianza is striving towards high quality apprenticeships, and meeting the needs of apprentices who prefer alternating learning between the VET school and the company. This also ensures a smooth

transition for young people from school into the labour market

2.1.3. Creating pathways for apprentices' representation

As of 2021, the Union of Students in Ireland (USI) represents 374 000 students including 24 212 apprentices with 8 607 new registrants last year. Progress is being made to introduce new apprenticeships in Ireland in areas such as wind turbine, maintenance and finance. A key goal of the Union is breaking down the stigma around completing an apprenticeship, promoting the value of apprenticeships and increasing the number of new registrants to 10 000 per year by 2025. There is a need to create pathways for apprentices to join the Union, ensure their voices are being heard and that they are empowered to share their voice.

The pandemic has created significant challenges for apprentices in Ireland as they have been confronted with a mental health crisis, accommodation shortages and engagement issues as collaboration with the second level student union and trade union has not been established. A key focus for USI is improving engagement between relevant stakeholders and strengthening communication in order to ensure apprentices are well represented, as well as lobbying for better accommodation and quality training.

2.1.4. Investing in quality education

Closing the first panel discussion of the event, Mr Nicolas Schmit, European Commissioner for Jobs and Social Rights, addressed the audience in a video message and reiterated the importance of 2022 as the year dedicated to young Europeans, and as the year to mark a turning point for policy makers who should hear the views and concerns of the new generation. More than ever, Europe needs the vision, engagement and participation of young people.

Investing in quality education can provide young people with prospects and hope for the future, despite the disproportionate challenges brought by the pandemic. The right to quality and inclusive education, training and lifelong learning represents the basis of the first European Pillar of Social Rights. In this context, apprenticeships can make a significant difference and create a win-win situation for both apprentices and companies by providing people with the relevant work experience and skills to be integrated into the labour market. Apprenticeships have also been recognised as an effective way of combating youth unemployment and facilitate the mobility of apprentices as part of the Youth Employment Support Package.

Since the launch of the renewed EAfA in July 2020 together with a new European Skills Agenda, more than 41 new members have pledged to provide more than 160 000 apprenticeship places to young people. The EAN has become a strong ally of EAfA and aims to ensure young apprentices both in secondary and third level education contribute to policymaking by becoming a representative voice towards institutions and stakeholders at all levels. However, the limited opportunities for apprentices to be represented in national structures such as trade unions or youth organisations, or to contribute to policy discussions at the European level highlight key challenges that need to be addressed.

2.2. The European Year of Youth

The following thematic discussion of the European Year of Youth event was moderated by **Ms Chiara Riondino**, Head of Unit, DG EMPL, European Commission.



Speakers:

- **Ms Caridad Alarcon Sanchez**, Board Member, OBESSU: Key-note speech on the European Year of Youth 2022
- **Mr Michael Teutsch**, Head of Unit for Schools and Multilingualism, DG Education and Culture
- **Mr Markus Wright**, Committee member of ETUC Youth

2.2.1. Listening to apprentices' views

The aim of the European Year of Youth is to promote a positive message after the pandemic and give young people a voice as they were the most impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the Ukrainian refugee crisis. The challenges faced by young people and the opportunities they have lost in the last years need to be recognised. Important steps need to be taken to put the needs of young people at the centre of attention and acknowledge the issues around mental health and wellbeing.

The first step to improve the level of apprentices in decision-making at national and European level is hearing apprentices' voices. To achieve this, an important role that EAN can play is acting as a bridge between apprentices and European institutions, ensuring apprentices' demands and views are heard. It's also essential to empower apprentices to provide solutions on how to tackle the key problems they are currently facing, as well as to contribute to sharing their own work environment. The conference also highlighted the importance of inclusiveness and ensuring that young people of different ages and backgrounds feel heard and have the chance to contribute to their future and influence decisions.

2.2.2. The opportunities of the European Year of Youth

The launch of the Youth Employment Initiative, relaunch of EAfA and Reinforced Youth Guarantee were some of the concrete steps taken by the European Commission to provide support to young people and alleviate the impact of the pandemic.

In addition, the European Year of Youth aims to ensure that young people have more and better opportunities. This initiative also complements NextGenerationEU, which targets high quality job, education and training opportunities for young Europeans. One of the key objectives of this year is to boost young people's personal, social and professional development. This is fully in line with the EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027. In the post-pandemic crisis, it is of utmost importance that young people receive not just an education, but the right education and skills that will enable them to contribute to technological development and sustainability, and help them to achieve their own financial security and wellbeing.

Beyond formal vocational education and training, young people can also participate in mobility exchanges. These exchanges implement non-formal learning tools and methods to help young people acquire and develop

competences for life and their professional future. Participants emphasised during this session the importance of continuing mobilities despite the challenges brought by the Ukrainian refugee crisis.

2.2.3. Developing more agile and adaptable education and training systems

Over recent years, rapid digitalisation has changed many aspects of how we work, learn, travel and discover new things. The world has changed enormously, however education systems have remained the same as the ones developed a few centuries ago. The lack of flexibility within the education system punishes young people for making a wrong choice and restricts them from changing paths making it harder for them to pursue a different education path. To tackle these challenges, it is imperative to place the student's voice at the centre of decision-making. Promoting a culture of lifelong learning and introducing more work-based learning is equally important.

A positive example was provided this year as European countries were able to adapt to the challenges brought by the Ukrainian crisis by learning from each other and engaging in exchanges and projects. Further work is needed to promote flexible pathways, teaching at an early age and to equip young people with the learning competences to learn and adapt to technological changes. In the context of the digital and green transition, it is essential to develop more agile and adaptable education and training systems that are actually addressing the needs of young people.

2.3. Dual VET: The Spanish case

Moderated by **Ms Maria Pascual** representing the Directorate General for Vocational Education and Training of the Regional Government of Catalonia, the third session of the event discussed the aspects of the dual VET system in Spain and main reforms.



Speakers:

- **Ms Clara Sanz**, General Secretariat for Vocational Training
- **Mr Ignacio de Benito**, Senior Project Manager, Fundación Bertelsmann, Spain
- **Mr José A. Andrés Villena**, Directorate General for Vocational Education of the Regional Government of Catalonia
- **Mr Ricard Bellera Kirchoff**, Representative of Catalan social partners (CCOO, Foment, Pimec UGT)

2.3.1. Apprenticeships in the new education law

Advancing successful and quality apprenticeships remains a priority for the Spanish government as well as the European Commission. The draft law consolidates the current vocational training of the education system and vocational training for employment into a unique model at the service of students and workers. The future law thus establishes a single, modular and flexible provision of vocational training. It will be organised in training itineraries that encourages progression through five ascending grades: grade A – partial accreditation of competences; grade B – Certificate of Professional Competence; grade C – Professional Certificate; grade D – Training Cycles; and grade E – Specialisation Courses.

The new education law addresses the realities of the Spanish labour market as 46 % of the active population does not have accredited experience. It promotes the principle of lifelong training guaranteeing that training is accessible to all and ensures that qualifications are associated with the European Framework of Qualifications and the Spanish framework. The modular system of VET will allow everyone to increase their qualifications and competences.

Furthermore, the new model emphasises the co-responsibility between the training provider and company and defines the roles of school and company tutors to enhance the quality of apprenticeships. Training and working agreements are also regulated by the law. This new vocational training system is offered to people throughout their lives and prioritises digitalisation and sustainability.

2.3.2. Apprentices network ‘Somos FP dual’

A working group was created in 2018 to give a voice to young people that had completed vocational education and training. The project included 50 young people originally and aimed to promote dual VET, break the existing barriers and enhance the reputation of apprenticeships.

The objectives of the network are to improve the reputation of apprenticeships by sharing testimonials of apprentices and promoting it as a model of success, to empower apprentices so that they can contribute to building a better VET system and to exchange good practices with international networks. In 2019, Somos FP dual involved 7 500 young people and in 2020, the network continued to grow whilst moving its activities online and in a hybrid format. In 2021, it received the support of the Commercial Chamber of Spain, and it was incorporated across six different regions of Spain.

The network now has more than 140 ambassadors collaborating and working on the project. It has carried out more than 100 activities and managed to reach out to almost 10 000 people. Among its future objectives, the network aims to gain the commitment of young people, companies and schools. It also aims to increase its LinkedIn presence as well as use other social media platforms to reach younger demographics, and increase its number of ambassadors and activities carried out in Spain. The ultimate objective of Somos FP dual is to give young people the opportunity to be heard and to voice their opinions.

2.3.3. Dual VET implementation in Catalunya

Dual VET is enabling the transition of apprentices into the labour market and fostering their growth. In Catalunya, there was already a strong vision about alternating VET and in 2012, a series of measures were provided to increase the quality of apprenticeships for Spanish students. The key actions undertaken as a result of the Council's recommendation related to the European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships (EFQEA) were to: ensure pedagogical support for company mentors; compensate students through an employment contract/grant; provide safe working conditions; involve social partners; and develop career guidance and awareness raising activities.

The partnership between all relevant stakeholders was essential in ensuring that students were equipped with the skills needed to work in today's society. The regional and local government played a key role but the movement to enhance the quality of apprenticeships needs to be accompanied by the whole society. Currently, there are more than 65 000 companies involved in the training of students (in dual VET and paid apprenticeships) but the number of businesses interested in providing apprenticeships continues to grow.

2.3.4. Role of social partners in dual VET

The legal framework of Vocational Education and Training in Spain and Catalonia reinforces the role of social partners defining the model and rules of dual VET. Our participation at the Catalan System of Vocational Training and Qualification facilitates the reach of necessary consensus to adapt VET to the needs of workers and companies through social dialogue.

Developing the dual VET System in Spain should rely optimally upon collective bargaining. Broad agreements at Spanish (AENC) and Catalan (AIC) level provide an important basis to strengthen existing capacities at economic sectors, especially considering that Small and mid-size enterprises (SMEs) create more than 70 % of employment in Spain.

The high unemployment rate of young workers (29 % 16-24 years), the important number of workers without any recognised competences (44 %) and the low rate of women in TIC and STEM careers highlights the role that VET and dual VET can play in reinforcing social and cross-generational cohesion.

Spain (3.67 %) and Catalonia (4.18 %) have a low public expenditure on education compared with the rest of Europe (5 %). Performing dual VET in Spain needs an important budgetary effort. The current investment opportunities in the framework of Next Generation recovery plans should break the cycle in benefit of workers and companies through dual VET.

2.4. Representation of apprentices: The national dimension

The final panel discussion exploring apprentices' models of representation at the national level was moderated by Ms Ann Vanden Bulcke, representing the Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, from the European Commission.



Speakers:

- **Mr Scott Kelly**, National Society of Apprentices, UK
- **Mr Baptiste Bouyer**, Head of Representation and Institutions Relations Department, National Association of Apprentices (ANAF), France
- **Ms Melissa Luck**, dbb Jugend, Germany
- **Ms Uliana Musakina**, SAKKI ry, Finland
- **Ms Trine Kjeldsen Johannsen**, EEO, Denmark

2.4.1. Positive examples of apprentices' representation

This session presented several examples of good practices across Europe. These included: ensuring the representation of apprentices at the national level; advocating for apprentices' rights; and advocating for quality apprenticeships.

The first organisation presented was the **National Society of Apprentices** which represents the voices and welfare of apprentices throughout the UK. The Society fights issues such as apprentices' pay, representation, quality of education, etc. A recent campaign addressed the issue of apprentices' mental health and succeeded in advocating the Scottish Parliament to adopt a mental health reform allocating EUR 3 million to students including apprentices.

The **National Association for French apprentices (ANAF)** was created due to the lack of representation for apprentices across France. The Association's main aims are to promote the voices of apprentices and informing students about the benefits of apprenticeships in order to improve the image of vocational education and training. More recently, ANAF has developed 23 proposals for apprenticeships which it has proposed to all presidential candidates.

In Germany, **dbb Jugend** represents the main union of various trade unions in the public sector. It includes over 1.3 million members in more than 40 trade unions. An election of apprentices' representatives is held regularly. The representatives advocate for better training and work conditions, promote the quality of apprenticeships and represent the apprentices' interests at national level.

In Finland, there are three main apprenticeship types: on-job-learning; paid apprenticeships; and Young entrepreneurship. During on-the-job-learning, students acquire competences in the workplace through practical work tasks. Since the student is not officially employed, they are not paid a salary or other consideration. Paid apprenticeships are mostly undertaken by students who continue their studies while actively working in the same or related field with additional courses taken in other establishments, if necessary. In the Young entrepreneurship or JA Company Programme, the participants establish a JA company that operates using real money for the duration of a semester, school year or calendar year. The program covers each stage of a company's existence from establishing a company to winding down its operation. **SAKKI ry** is the Finnish Association of Vocational Students,

which establishes the regulations surrounding the three types of apprenticeships and ensures the high quality of the apprenticeship, its monitoring and learning outcomes.

EEO's main aim is to protect the high level of education that technical and vocational students in Denmark receive, and to ensure that the standard does not drop. The union advocates for raising wages, improving working conditions for apprentices, ensuring quality education and safe work environments, as well as emphasising the importance of continuously improving apprenticeships, attracting great teachers and investing in education and technology.

2.4.2. Tackling the challenges of apprentices' representation

National organisations representing the interests of apprentices are an important way of ensuring the interests and voices of apprentices are being heard by decision-makers. In the UK, the National Society of Apprentices managed to advocate for the bill on mental health and ensure apprentices across the country have access to mental health counselling.

In France, ANAF gathered feedback from apprentices through an online consultation and put forward for debate the apprentices' proposals during the presidential elections. Moreover, the association regularly visits schools to engage vocational students and empower them with tools so they can voice their opinions. One online platform was also created to inform apprentices about the financial help available to them.

SAKKI ry organises different events for Finnish students to raise awareness about the work of the organisation, as well as campaigns promoting positive examples and encouraging students to share their experience.

2.5. Parallel breakout sessions

2.5.1. The voice of apprentices: a new strategic approach

During this session, both apprentices and research experts discussed possible issues of focus for EAN such as apprentices' mental health, the accommodation crisis and their impact on learning. Apprentices presented on their experiences, the issues affecting their working and learning, and the negative effects brought by the COVID-19 pandemic as well as the Ukrainian refugee crisis. Key examples from various European countries were also put forward, which will influence the strategic direction of EAN going forward.

2.5.2. Challenges in supply and quality of apprenticeships and how to tackle them

This breakout session discussed the implementation of the criteria specified by the EFQEA, the progress achieved in Spain and ways to tackle the remaining challenges. An area where progress still needs to be made in Spain is regarding Criterion 3, pedagogical support. It was also recognised that more support is needed for companies, especially small businesses, which are essential in the implementation of dual education (Criterion 10). Key actions that need to be undertaken include: developing collaborative networks between relevant stakeholders, including education and training providers and companies; and sharing responsibilities in order to achieve change at the system level. The role of social partners is also extremely important as they are the promoters and creators of dual education in Spain but need to be better represented. Achieving the EFQEA criteria is essential for ensuring the high quality of vocational education and training, as well as enhancing the image of apprenticeships and breaking down stereotypes in the society.

2.5.3. Embedding the voice of apprentices in decision-making

A first step in the process of embedding the voices of apprentices in decision-making is to inform learners that their opinions are valuable and that they should be expressed. Raising awareness of the necessity and importance of involving apprentices is also essential.

Another key objective to be achieved is guiding apprentices on how to express their opinions by incorporating the development of soft skills, critical thinking, and presentation and negotiation skills into their training. Offering guidance throughout the process, facilitating an open dialogue, and discussions between decision-makers and apprentices represents a good example of how companies can start embedding the voices of young people into the decisions made. Another key step will be to create an environment which enables apprentices to raise their concerns and voice their opinions by adapting good practices and existing models of apprentices' representation.

2.5.4. Making apprenticeships more attractive for youth

Apprenticeships are a very effective tool in the transition from school to work for young people. In some cases apprenticeships are considered as a less prestigious educational path.

For example, in Slovenia there is a high demand among companies for apprenticeship programmes, but primary students are very reluctant to attend these types of programmes. However, challenges might vary between different countries, and it is crucial to address the misconceptions regarding apprenticeships and their benefits in comparison with higher education.

In order to create a narrative of apprenticeships that reaches different key stakeholders like the young people themselves, their families as well as teachers, career advisers, public authorities, and vocational education and training institutions need to ensure that the students are represented in the decision-making process. Moreover, Erasmus+ programmes as well as the recognition of qualifications, mobility and internationalisation can be used as a lever to enhance the image of apprenticeships. Investing in the quality of apprenticeships by attracting good teachers with technical skills and making programmes more permeable and flexible is equally important. There is also a need to improve working conditions, provide opportunities for upskilling and reskilling as well as improve the cooperation and exchange between different stakeholders. To make apprenticeships more attractive to girls, changing gender stereotypes based on traditional social roles needs to be addressed through education at a very early age. Practical learning can also be incorporated into school curriculums to improve the reputation of vocational education and training.

2.6. Presentation of good practices across Europe

2.6.1. ‘Lehre in Vorarlberg’ association- Austria

The Lifelong Learning Platform promotes a holistic vision to lifelong learning by facilitating European-wide, cross-sector cooperation among civil society organisations in the field of education and training, and voicing citizens’ concerns. The Platform was found in 2005 gathering more than 40 members and 50 000 education and training institutions. It carries out its activities pursuing the following overarching goals: building inclusive and democratic education systems; widening access to quality education for all citizens; and increasing the relevance of education to modern societies.

The good practice presented was the network created by apprentices for apprentices in 2019-2020 in Vorarlberg, Austria’s most western region. Its aims are to foster mutual exchange, support apprentices, promote information about other apprenticeships and raise the voice of apprentices. The creation of the association led to the establishment of a network of 7 000 apprentices in the region which collaborate on organising workshops, meetings and virtual visits with companies offering apprenticeships. The network also developed an online platform ‘MyLehre’ which facilitates the matchmaking between the needs of future apprentices and the offers from companies.

2.6.2. Innovative apprenticeship model- Ireland

ESB Networks’ apprenticeship model is a 4-year paid programme leading to QQI advanced level 6 Electrical trade certificate. The main benefits include operating in a team environment, a classroom-based learning combined with practical experience, working indoors and outdoors, and its internationally recognised qualification.

ESB Networks plan to further develop this model by incorporating innovative elements such as simulators and virtual reality that allow apprentices to safely make mistakes in training, develop their own digital content and incorporate interactive digital learning and practical skills. The organisation gives a voice to apprentices through a proactive promotion in media, encouraging apprentices to create digital training content and distributing an

apprentice newsletter. It also organises apprentice feedback and review sessions, and aims to promote a positive leadership culture.

2.6.3. Role of social partners in apprentices' representation

HAK-IS is the second biggest workers' confederation with around 750 000 members in all sectors such as municipal services, metal, food, finance, tourism, energy, textile and forestry. HAK-IS is an affiliate (member) of the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC); at the global level is a member organisation of ITUC (International Trade Union Confederation) and OECD's TUAC body as well as a member of EAfA network and Labour-20 (L-20) group that is a sub-component of the Group-20 (G-20).

HAK-IS is a social partner working nationally and globally to support all workers, particularly young and female apprentices by building bridges for the skills gap between education and employment.

As of February 2022, the number of apprenticeship opportunities furnished at head offices of HAK-IS and its sectorial affiliates (trade unions) is 269 within a close cooperation and coordination with the Turkish Employment Agency and universities. HAK-IS is also helping apprentices adapt to working life and the trade union culture by ensuring a high quality level for their apprenticeships, remunerating, reimbursing or compensating the apprentices and providing social protection and insurance.

2.6.4. Cross-border long-term apprentice mobility with BASF

Institute Comte de Rius provides education and training in vehicle electromechanics, chemistry, mechanical manufacturing, electricity and electronics, and building projects. The institute has 1 200 students and 97 teachers.

BASF's dual vocational training was developed around 10 years ago and it is an outcome of European cooperation. The classes are delivered in German at the Institute whilst the internships are organised at BASF's production centres in Tarragona and in Ludwigshafen, Germany. The programme is unique, combining theoretical and practical training, as well as on-the-job training. The language courses give the participants a complete overview and very good preparation for their subsequent job experiences in Germany.

Practical training alternates between two locations: BASF in Spain (three months) and Germany (six months). The duration of the programme is two and a half years. After successful completion of the programme, participants receive full-time placement at the production plant at the Ludwigshafen site of BASF SE (headquarters) in Germany. The advantages for the companies are the direct knowledge of student's competences, training in the company's own installations, integrating the student to their own internal training plans, academic recognition and curricular adaptability. Furthermore, the advantages for the institute are the increased value of the institute, motivation of students and improvement of their performance, teacher satisfaction, better teacher training and improved working relationships with the company.

2.6.5. Knowledge exchange between apprentices in a project-based learning approach

INS Escola del Treball, located in Lleida, is a vocational education and training centre providing the Laboratory of Analysis and Quality Control study programme. The centre pioneered the project-based learning methodology by providing a student-centred approach which aims to enhance teamwork, support learners in developing their soft-skills and problem-solving skills as well as providing a challenging and engaging learning environment. The main benefit of the programme is that it enables knowledge to transfer from the enterprise to the study centre and vice-versa.

The longer apprenticeship programme leads towards a more solid acquisition of skills. The work placement stands for the seventh project which is the final one. To establish cooperation with companies, the presentations of the final projects involve the enterprises which are then motivated and committed to keeping in contact with the institute. Moreover, students can use the latest equipment in the workplace which brings state-of-the-art technology in the classroom.

2.7. Evening programme

2.7.1. Cultural visit at St. Paul Hospital

The modernist complex of Sant Pau, built between 1905 and 1930, was designed by Lluís Domènech i Montaner as a garden city for the sick. After serving as a public hospital for a century, its renovated pavilions now shine in all their glory. Visiting this exceptional architectural ensemble is a unique experience.

At the end of the 19th century, the old building of the Hospital de la Santa Creu, which was in the Raval district of Barcelona, had become too small and outdated. It had to be relocated. Its counterpoint was an ambitious project, inspired by the most progressive hygienist currents of the time.

This modernist complex, the most important in Europe, is today a benchmark of Barcelona's monumental wealth and also of its innovative spirit. Listed in 1997 as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO, its architectural and artistic value acquires a new international dimension with the new use of the pavilions. The whole building is now a knowledge campus and the seat of international organisations, such as the European Forest Institute, Casa Àsia, the Global University Network for Innovation and the United Nations University Institute on Globalization, culture and mobility.

2.7.2. Official launch of the renewed EAN

During the official launch event of the renewed EAN, Matthäus Fandrejewski and Baptiste Bouyer reflected on the history of EAN, its seven priorities and the difficulties faced by apprentices in gaining recognition as equal partners in the discussions around their work, education and contribution to society.

While encouraging EAfA members to pledge to EAN's priorities, the network also presented the next main steps which are to:

- continue to actively support individual apprentices coming from different countries, and potentially contribute to setting up national structures to represent apprentices;
- engage existing national representation bodies;
- engage European organisations active in the field of apprenticeships in capacity building and advocacy.

EAN also reiterated the key challenges in terms of ensuring apprentices' representation in decision-making, while also highlighting the importance of flexibility and digitalisation in apprenticeships and VET. This includes global citizenship competences in curricula, and protecting work-life balance and apprentices mental health.

3.0. Day 2

3.1. Site visits

3.1.1. INS Escola del Treball

Escola del Treball is an institution that welcomed students of different levels of education, from compulsory secondary education to baccalaureate and vocational training. It is a diverse institution that trains people to acquire academic and professional skills that will allow them to access other studies or to integrate into the world of work.

During the visit of the INS Escola del Treball, participants had the opportunity to visit the facilities and tools available to students and see their work first-hand by attending several workshops in electrics, carpentry, electronics, chemistry, construction and graphic design. Participants were presented with several innovation and international mobility projects the institute is involved in, such as a KA121 and KA200 mobility projects for vocational training, in addition to exchange programmes with Miyakojima School in Japan and inter-institutional agreements with schools in France and Germany.

3.1.2. INS Bonanova

Institut Bonanova is a public centre specialising in health and socio-health training with 40 years of experience. It has trained more than 4 000 students. The centre provides intermediate and advanced courses, continuing education through the Bonanova Foundation and accreditation of work experience. During their visit, participants learnt about the innovative methodologies used for training future healthcare professionals.

For instance, the Virtual Hospital is an original teaching tool, designed as a practice classroom on databases and information systems similar to those used on a day-to-day basis in a medium-sized general hospital. The aim is to allow students to carry out practical activities in a simulated healthcare company as if they were working in a real environment. Advanced simulation is also used as a learning methodology to develop the necessary technical and non-technical skills of students.

3.2. Parallel EAfA activities

3.2.1. Benchlearning activities

The meeting of benchlearning volunteering countries gathering the coordinators from French-speaking Belgium, Dutch-speaking Belgium, France, Greece and Spain took place on 25 March. The coordinators had the opportunity to reflect on the information collected during the main event and side visits, and discuss how their respective national practices could be more representative of apprentices. All coordinators echoed the importance of increasing the awareness of apprentices' mental health needs.

3.2.2. EAN podcast

The second EAfA podcast episode was also recorded during the main event in Barcelona. This episode aimed to shed light on a very topical issue, namely the subject of 'improving the overall image and attractiveness of apprenticeships' across Europe, and in particular key insights around what can be done to create a better perception of apprenticeships as a positive study choice. The podcast was moderated by Maria Melstveit Roseme, an education policy expert with Ecorys, and included the voice of apprentices who discussed what they think needs to be done on this topic. The main guests were Markus Wright from the EAN and Ana Carrero, Deputy Head of Unit at the European Commission's Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion.

