

ApprEnt Policy Recommendations for a better European Higher Education Apprenticeship model

INTRODUCTION

Growing productivity of industrial work is resulting in **high youth unemployment**. At the same time **skills requirements** are changing: more high level knowledge as well as experience-based competencies are needed. Hence, there is a particular need to promote and expand the capacity of work based learning and apprenticeships. In this respect, the major challenge will be to reintegrate and synchronise the “working and the learning worlds” so they understand each other better and cooperate in a more natural and useful way.

The *Position Paper of the European university continuing education network, eucen*, on *University Lifelong Learning promoting the Agenda 2030 on Sustainable Development* says:

- ▲ *universities have to act as particular VET providers with specific focuses in skills development, based on research and development, via inter-sectoral HVET¹ and HCVET² projects; universities engaged in lifelong learning have specific roles in developing and intensifying the “joy to learn” and in proposing innovative methods for learning in diverse environments (e.g. at work, at home, volunteering posts, leisure, etc.);*
- ▲ *higher education institutions must promote transferability of training into workplace through specific methodologies in curricula design in frames of workplace learning and also to underline the role of validation of prior learning in order to emphasize collection and sharing of valuable knowledge;*

Also, on *eucen* and the *HEI/VET Cooperation Position Paper, 2017*, it can be read that:

- ▲ The research-based development of professional expertise *differs fundamentally* from the skills-oriented education and training for vocations (...) Still, there are **various activities** that **link higher education with VET** and whose situation clearly indicates the **need of enhanced cooperation**.

¹ Higher Vocational Education and Training

² Higher Continuous Vocational Education and Training

- ▲ As a part of widening access to universities, they could actively promote the pathways, tools and procedures opening doors to new publics from VET. The pathways from VET to universities are partially open but the numbers of applicants, not to say students, are limited and there are various hindrances to be tackled and procedures and practices to be developed. **Many universities train teachers for VET institutions and support their continuous education.** Various fields of research focus on issues that are relevant for the VET world. The institutions from both fields cooperate in various development projects.

The **ApprEnt project** intends to bridge the gap between the world of education and business, enhancing partnerships that involve companies, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) as VET providers, and other relevant stakeholders such as public bodies, representatives of learners and representatives of VET providers, with the ultimate aim of promoting the establishment of work-based learning (WBL) and especially apprenticeship. In this particular point **ApprEnt** has produced a set of policy recommendations on how VET in HEIs can promote the implementation of apprenticeships and work-based learning schemes and thus contribute to address the problems of unemployment and skills shortages.

Some of the documents that have been used as background reading can be found online following this link <https://apprent.eucen.eu/tools>

The European Pillar of Social Rights presented as its first principle 'Education, Training and Lifelong Learning': *Everyone has the right to quality and inclusive education, training and life-long learning in order to maintain and acquire skills that enable them to participate fully in society and manage successfully transitions in the labour market.*

The feedback of our partners, based on their Country Case Studies and their Transversal Analysis, 2018, present a very diverse picture of implementation. Some partners have consulted key stakeholders and civil society and linked the strategy with existing initiatives. Other partners do have basic strategies, but they are currently not linked with HE and SME collaboration. In some countries, working groups or projects have been established in order to implement this collaboration. There **are examples** of countries where apprenticeship in HE is in piloting phase.

The European universities continuing education network, **eucen**, and the **ApprEnt** consortium highlight some key recommendations for the broader and better implementation of University-Business collaboration, in relation to the promotion of WBL and apprenticeship schemes, namely at Higher Education level. The HEA are of vital importance nowadays since they bridge and strengthen the University-Business collaboration, also making way to more efficient and consistent training of mentors and supervisors at different qualification levels.

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POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Regulations

To set up clear understanding of what are apprenticeships, internships and traineeships: what connects them and what identifies them.

To set up a clear and transnational understanding of apprenticeships (including quality issues and expected outcomes), that allow institutions, enterprises and students to set up arrangements in the EU for mobility while guaranteeing some minimum standards that improve the students' skills in a recognised way in all member states.

Students would: have a clear understanding of what is a (HE) apprenticeship in comparison to an internship or traineeship agreement; be guaranteed to develop specific skills in their specific degree; be assured their developed skills will be recognised in any EU country.

2. Strategic policy-making

To consider the development of apprenticeships of higher levels of education as part of overall strategic goal to integrate work-based and vocationally oriented learning with academic learning/general education. Considering the growing importance of work-based learning, the professionalization and professional development of workplace mentors should be one of the goals in education strategy as well as in governance of economic affairs.

Students would: be all ensured of opportunities of apprenticeships in the formal and continuous education programmes.

3. Training

To ensure that mentors³ in companies and HEIs have the pedagogical skills and competences needed to guide and support students and they are provided proper training. To standardise the training of mentors so they understand the nature and use of apprenticeship programmes. At the same time, they would be prepared for (a) making the students the centre of the learning process and (b) learn themselves how to work and collaborate with other mentors from industry and HEIs.

Students would: receive supervision from prepared professionals that understand the challenges of apprenticeship programmes; be guided by a more academic/theoretical and a practical mentor in order to find synergies between the two worlds and understand the circularity of both types of learning.

4. Mobility

To encourage mobility schemes for academics and non-academics involved in apprenticeship schemes at regional, national or international level. The length could be of one week to three months. Institutions and enterprises would be encouraged to welcome and attend visitors as well as to promote mobility amongst their own staff.

Students would: interact with staff that has experienced mobility and can explain how it works and which are the benefits of these opportunities. They could also inform students of points to be aware of and how to be prepared for these exchanges.

5. Guidance, coordination and assessment

To establish dedicated and permanent 'orientation and guidance' spaces (either online or face-to-face) that link enterprises, HEIs, mentors and students towards "Access for success" and ensure smooth administrative processes.

³ Mentors (from SMEs and industry) and supervisors (from HEIs) will be called "mentors" in this document, as a global concept, from this point onwards. However, it is important for the reader to understand that we refer to both individuals.

To design suitable assessment methods and tools to monitor the learning achieved (e.g. the use of ePortfolios and/or ensure periodical common reflection sessions).

Students would: have access to better informed and supported mentors in their apprenticeship courses; move from isolated individual learning to network-based and collaborative learning, involving systematic meetings of students, mentors and, if necessary, people from the administrative offices.

6. Quality Assurance

To ensure quality placements where apprentices learn and get prepared for their future working life.

To design quality criteria involving the needs of both sides – HEIs and SMEs considering knowledge-based analysis for future labour market and skills needed, ensuring the quality of the training of the mentors.

Students would: benefit from work-based learning placements that are designed and implemented according to clearly established criteria that ensure quality assurance.

7. Allocate resources

To promote work-based learning (WBL) and apprenticeship positions for young undergraduates and graduates. To work out new and collaborative pedagogical tools based on clear and context-specific conceptual / theoretical framework, to be used by both the company and HEI mentors. In general, to allocate more resources for the promotion and development of WBL and apprenticeship programmes at different levels, namely considering the time spent by the mentors in the performance of their duties as such.

Students would: have more chances to request and follow WBL or apprenticeship programmes; access WBL and apprenticeship programmes with more means and higher quality.

8. Funding companies

To encourage and financially support companies to allow workers time to become mentors and interact with their colleagues at HEIs, and vs.

Students would: benefit from mentors being able to devote time and resources to them, since their role and functions are fully recognised and funded for.

9. Transparency

To monitor, compare and share implemented actions on expenditure required for the implementation of prior categories, pedagogical methodologies, learning outcomes and assessment criteria.

Students would: benefit from schemes that are clear, understandable, fair and accountable.

10. Sustainability

To make sure that concepts and practice are provided so permeability between levels is fostered. Promote flexible trajectories and mobility. Foster a long-term vision and enduring actions. Two different levels of sustainability have to be beard in mind: regulatory and applied. This means continued support of the training of trainers, both from companies and from HEIs, legislating, regulating and implementing measures to ensure that short-term actions can take place.

Students would: benefit from permeability between learning pathways and from enhanced mobility. They would also benefit from schemes that pursue a coherent long-term, flexible vision and are not subject to frequent reshuffling.

| MEASURES THAT CAN BE TAKEN BY EACH LEVEL | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|--|
| | EU level | National level | HEIs level | Business level |
| 1. Regulations | Development of an EU level set of rules that make mobility and accreditation easier in all countries subscribing it. | Adopt the regulations recommended by the EU and adapt them to the national level, in order to unify criteria and facilitate working with other EU countries. | Test how the new regulations work with a real programme. Facilitate the test, collect feedback and send it back to policy makers for refining. | Accept incorporating new regulations to current procedures and collaborate in testing them with real cases. Send feedback to policy makers for refining. |
| 2. Strategic policy-making | Provide distinguished policy vision and package for apprenticeships of higher level of education. | Work out and apply for distinguished policy package for apprenticeships of higher level of education that consider specific national context. | Implement special policy measures, create coordinating efforts and resources and encourage students. | Participate via special policy measures, create a special team of apprenticeships and management. |
| 3. Training | Provide policy, financial and logistical support to countries prepared to regulate training for mentors. | Launch, promote and encourage training for mentors with national awards or advantages and develop a mentors' network. Establish financial and logistical means to HEIs and companies. | Introduce and encourage training for mentors and feedback networks. Allocate adequate time and resources. Offer "compensation in kind" (time or credits). Ensure full recognition of mentors' role and competences. | Announce and encourage training for mentors. Allocate adequate time and resources. Offer "compensation in kind" (time or credits). Ensure full recognition of mentors' role and competences. |
| 4. Mobility | Offer mobility grants for academics and non-academics working in apprenticeship programmes. Offer better grants to organisations welcoming visitors. | Launch, promote and encourage mobility for academics and non-academics working in apprenticeship programmes. Offer better grants to organisations welcoming visitors. | Introduce and encourage mobility with other HEIs or enterprises working with apprenticeships or interested to do so. Welcome visitors. | Announce and encourage mobility with other enterprises or HEIs involved in apprenticeship programmes. Welcome visitors. |
| 5. Guidance and coordination | Guidelines on how to establish national guidelines offices and offer financial support. Promote transnational cooperation and cross-fertilisation in the process. | Establish a national office with online help desk and face-to-face staff, allocating adequate funding and resources. Providing web-based information about the opportunities of apprenticeship studies at HE level for all the target groups. | Create an institutional profile and appoint a member of staff to give advice and help. Allocate adequate funding and resources. | Create an enterprise profile and appoint a representative to give advice and help. Allocate adequate funding and resources. |

| | MEASURES THAT CAN BE TAKEN BY EACH LEVEL | | | |
|-----------------------------|---|---|---|---|
| | EU level | National level | HEIs level | Business level |
| 6. Quality | Create quality control measures. | Adopt officially quality control measures and give to them adequate publicity. Award those who apply quality control measures. | Embed quality control measures in everyday management of WBL and apprenticeship schemes. Watch business attending apprentices. Adopt curricula according to the needs of the employers and other organisations. | Embed quality control measures in everyday management of work-based learning and apprenticeship provide furnish students with needed knowledge. |
| 7. Resources | Launch publicity campaign in EU. Fund more projects that promote work-based learning and apprenticeship schemes. | Give tax discounts to employers using these types of placements. | Organise info sessions every year for both internal and external audience. Provide 'interest' forms to potential apprentices. | Prepare description of skills needed by the apprentices for HEIs to identify candidates. |
| 8. Funding companies | Award European support for countries implementing the European regulations for apprenticeship programmes. | Award national support to institutions implementing the European regulations for apprenticeship programmes. | Allocate in the annual budget a section to improve and enlarge apprenticeship collaboration (e.g. in terms of training, time and/or dedication of staff, etc.). | Allocate in the annual budget a section to improve and enlarge apprenticeship collaboration (e.g. in terms of training, time and/or dedication of staff). |
| 9. Transparency | Request annual reports to EU member states adopting the European regulations that receive some sort of funding. Assess use of the funding. Assess quality of programmes funded. Compare practices across countries and benchmark. | Request annual reports to HEIs/enterprises adopting the European regulations that receive some sort of funding. Assess use of the funding. Assess quality of programmes funded. Sharing good practices. | Preparing annual reports highlighting how the funding received has been used and doing an analysis on number of students, academic successful rates, incorporation to jobs rates, etc. Sharing good practices. | Preparing annual reports highlighting how the funding received has been used and which students from which HEIs have given a more useful input to the company, how many have been recruited, etc. Sharing good practices. |
| 10. Sustainability | Promote permeability and flexibility of learning pathways between sectors. Pursue a coherent and consistent policy vision for the benefit of all actors involved. | Adopt general frameworks allowing for flexibility between learning pathways and stick to a consistent long-term vision for the benefit of all actors involved. | Devise strategies and implement actions to accommodate greater flexibility between learning pathways and preserve a consistent long-term strategy for the benefit of all actors involved. | Cooperate with education providers with the aim of facilitating greater flexibility between learning pathways for the benefit of all actors involved. |