



Engaging employers in work-based learning and apprenticeships: A recommendations paper

ESF Transnational Cooperation Platform

Community of Practice on Employment, Education and Skills

Written by ICF
June 2022

EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion
Unit G.1 – European Social Fund+

Contact: Raphaëlle Bolognini

E-mail: Raphaelle.Bolognini@ec.europa.eu

European Commission
B-1049 Brussels

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Manuscript completed in June 2022

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Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2022

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PDF ISBN: 978-92-76-53271-2

doi:10.2767/302087

KE-07-22-424-EN-N

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What is the European Social Fund (ESF) Transnational Cooperation Platform?

Mutual learning is at the core of the ESF Transnational Cooperation Platform and its four Communities of Practice (CoP): employment, education and skills; social inclusion; results-based management; and social innovation.

The ESF Transnational Cooperation Platform gives CoP members, including managing authorities, intermediate bodies and other ESF stakeholders, the opportunity to participate in mutual learning activities and tackle common challenges together. The CoPs were created as a place for members to share ideas and concerns, deepen knowledge and expertise, and help one another to solve problems with practical approaches.

The mutual learning activities generate hands-on outputs such as toolkits, guides, practice mapping, checklists and recommendation papers that can inspire practitioners and policymakers alike.

Introduction

The European Social Fund (ESF+) programme foresees key investments to facilitate transitions from education and training to work, including through work-based learning and apprenticeships. The successful collaboration with stakeholders, especially small and medium enterprises (SMEs), employers, and VET providers is understood as a key success factor for ESF+ programmes to support the establishment of effective work-based learning and apprenticeships programmes and schemes.

To explore and exchange on efficient ways to manage ESF+ programmes, calls and funding opportunities in the context of work-based learning and apprenticeships a virtual Peer Review on employer engagement in work-based learning and apprenticeships took place from 15 to 16 June 2021, bringing together 18 participants from ESF managing authorities, intermediate bodies and project promoters.

Aims and purpose of this paper

This 'Recommendations Paper' summarises the experiences of ESF managing authorities and intermediate bodies in developing projects, calls and programmes for providing financial aid to support employer engagement in work-based learning and apprenticeships. The paper is enriched by information on the main EU policy initiatives of the last decade that provide a theoretical framework for embedding work-based learning and apprenticeships in (vocational) education and training. Inspiring examples about practices from EU member states show how ESF+ managing authorities can successfully engage to promote work-based learning and apprenticeships and enhance employer engagement.

The paper aims to disseminate knowledge and experiences among national ESF+ managing authorities to effectively support the development and refinement of ESF+ programmes, ESF+ calls and projects in that context. It can assist relevant institutions *at all governance levels* - whether already engaged in work-based learning and apprenticeships or not - to receive information on the *status quo of the implementation* of work-based learning and apprenticeships in EU countries and on the experiences of ESF+ managing authorities and intermediate bodies in *developing calls for proposals, projects and programmes*.

Information was gathered by desk research and through the Peer Review of the ESF Transnational Cooperation Platform (Community of Practice Employment, Education and Skills) that took place in June 2021. The paper further builds on the work done by the ESF Thematic Network 'Learning and Skills', and its final paper 'Quality Apprenticeships: A need for ESF Transnational Cooperation', published in September 2020¹.

¹ Representatives of the European Commission were joined by managing authorities/intermediate body representatives from Belgium-Flanders, Czech, Estonia, Finland, Greece, Italy, Lithuania, Slovakia and Spain (national level and from the La Rioja region).

1. Apprenticeships and work-based learning in EU policy

The ESF+ is Europe's main financial instrument for supporting jobs, helping people get better jobs and ensuring fairer job opportunities for all EU citizens. It works by investing in Europe's human capital – its workers, its young people and all those seeking a job². Many ESF+ programmes across the EU support work-based learning and apprenticeships. As the Peer Review on employer engagement in work-based learning and apprenticeships in June 2021 found out, ESF+ funding is primarily being used to support reforms in VET (including building partnerships); piloting approaches; providing subsidies for students and employers; and providing funding for specialist equipment by VET providers.

All these activities are in line with recent policy priorities at EU level. The key EU initiatives presented in the following section can provide a useful framework for the design of programmes and measures in the areas mentioned above and might serve to inspire ESF+ managing authorities and intermediate bodies to engage in new and innovative areas.

Apprenticeships and work-based learning are a key component of the EU strategy to improve the quality of VET, tackle youth unemployment and social exclusion

Over the past decade, the EU has been promoting work-based learning – especially in the form of apprenticeships - as a key component of a wider strategy to improve the quality of VET, tackle youth unemployment and social exclusion, taking several key policy initiatives in the 2010s after the economic crisis and its massive impact on youth employment. The European Commission's communication, [Rethinking Education: Investing in skills for better socio-economic outcomes \(2012\)](#), identified quality apprenticeships and other forms of work-based learning as a strategic priority for the period 2015-2020.

The New Skills Agenda for Europe, launched in June 2016 by the Council of the European Union, contained a [Recommendation on a European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships \(EFQEA\) in March 2018](#), in line with the underlying principles of the [European Pillar of Social Rights](#), the Recommendation referred to long-term effects and stated its overall objective *'to increase the employability and personal development of apprentices and to contribute to the development of a highly skilled and qualified workforce, responsive to labour market needs.'*

Since 2013, the EU has supported member states on expanding existing apprenticeship schemes or introducing new ones also through the [European Alliance for Apprenticeships \(EAfA\)](#), which was relaunched in 2020 and embedded in the [Pact for Skills](#) as announced in the [European Skills Agenda](#) for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience. The main objective of the Pact is to mobilise and incentivise all relevant stakeholders to take concrete actions for the upskilling and

² <https://ec.europa.eu/esf/main.jsp?catId=35&langId=en>

reskilling of the workforce by pooling efforts and setting up partnerships to address the needs of the labour market, thus supporting green and digital transitions as well as local, regional growth strategies.

Building on the New Skills Agenda, the European Council presented the '[Council Recommendation on vocational education and training \(VET\)](#) for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience' in December 2020. The VET Recommendation links education and training with broader economic objectives and suggests a policy package of actions, pursuing a 'paradigm shift in skills' to take advantage of the green and digital transitions and support a prompt recovery from the COVID-19 crisis'. The role of work-based learning and apprenticeships was again underlined: *the combination of the two learning venues – school and workplace – in 'dual learning' apprenticeship schemes brings about the real added value for the learner through a combination of theoretical learning and practical experience.*

Additional emphasis, including for the long-term career prospects of learners, came from [the Osnabrück Declaration on vocational education and training as an enabler of recovery and just transitions to digital and green economies](#). In November 2020, the Ministers in charge of VET in the member states, the EU candidate countries and the EEA countries, the European social partners and the European Commission agreed on a set of policy actions at national level to complement and operationalise the vision and strategic objectives formulated in the VET Recommendation. This includes:

- Reinforce work-based learning and apprenticeships by implementing the European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships and strengthen the use of quality and inclusive apprenticeships as a tool to support school/training-to-work transitions of vulnerable groups and to improve citizens' qualification levels³.
- Improve permeability between vocational training (incl. work-based learning) and academic pathways, establishing quality and effective VET and apprenticeship programmes at European Qualification Framework (EQF) level 5 and above⁴.
- New commitments and partnerships for quality and effective apprenticeships linked to green technologies and occupations, under the renewed [European Alliance for Apprenticeships](#), focusing on the economic sectors that will be on the frontline of the transition to a climate-neutral Europe⁵.

Evidence shows that apprenticeships and work-based learning facilitate transitions into employment

Between 2015 and 2018, [Cedefop, the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training](#) implemented a multi-faceted research project on the 'Changing nature and role of vocational education and training (VET) in Europe'. The purpose of the project was to investigate the challenges and opportunities for the VET sector in the EU countries. The research paper '[Education and labour market outcomes for vocational education and training graduates in different types of VET systems in Europe](#)' that was prepared in that context shows that vocational upper-secondary education – particularly

³ Cf. Osnabrück Declaration 2020, page 6

⁴ Cf. Osnabrück Declaration 2020, page 6

⁵ Cf Osnabrück Declaration 2020, page 9

apprenticeships and work-based learning – is highly effective in facilitating transitions into employment: vocational education and training can protect labour market entrants against unemployment and unskilled work (the '**safety net effect**')⁶. Especially in countries with 'dual systems'⁷, positive impacts on the labour market entry of vocational school graduates are measurable, sheltering them from unemployment and unskilled jobs. Hence, in apprenticeship countries and in countries with combined work- and school-based vocational education, vocational secondary education seems to have a safety net function⁸.

To ensure sustainable results, apprenticeships and work-based learning should provide long-term career prospects and access to further education

While the Cedefop analysis confirms the positive role of VET, apprenticeships and work-based learning in terms of labour market outcomes for graduates, it also reveals that vocational upper-secondary education does not automatically provide graduates with the opportunity to continue their studies in formal or in non-formal education (often further 'bridging' courses are required). In many countries, VET is still used primarily as a route into work rather than further study. Attention needs to be given to the long-term effect of vocational education: without opportunities for progression, VET can restrict the range of occupational opportunities available in the long-term (the '**diversion effect**'). Consequently, the extent to which VET leads to skilled positions on the occupational ladder and provides career prospects as well as access to further education is an important indicator for its attractiveness.

A decision for a VET pathway should not 'divert' young people from further (tertiary) education. To avoid any later life disadvantages for VET graduates, compared to graduates from school-based tracks, progression routes between different types and levels of education and training are important. To ensure long-term career opportunities and sustainable employment prospects, apprenticeships and work-based learning should grant access to further training, and flexible transitions between the world of education and training and the world of work should be possible⁹.

Several types of work-based learning and apprenticeships exist, depending on the country context

Across the EU, a broad variety of work-based learning and apprenticeships exists, as was discussed in the Peer Review on employer engagement in work-based learning and apprenticeships. The spectrum ranges from apprenticeships that are part of the formal education and training system and are based on robust social dialogue and intensive public-private partnerships, to short, informal work experiences. The box below clarifies the understanding of the terms that have been used to prepare this paper.

⁶ Measured as avoiding the risk of unemployment/low-skilled employment at labour market entrance

⁷ The term 'dual system' refers to the two learning venues: learning at school/at the workplace.

⁸ 'Education and labour market outcomes for vocational education and training graduates in different types of VET systems in Europe. Cedefop 2017. Page 6-8

⁹ *ibid*

Work-based learning can be understood as any type of learning that happens in the workplace, in initial (VET) training, in an internship, through informal work experiences, during a career, in continuing (VET) training, and in other contexts.

Apprenticeships should be understood as a specific form of work-based learning, usually initial VET, usually leading to a qualification, that is characterised by alternance between two learning venues (VET school and company) and a high share (at least 50%) of on-the-job-training. Apprentices are usually contractually bound to their training company and are often based on a tripartite agreement that is part of the social dialogue in the country¹⁰.

In a 2018 study¹¹, Cedefop mapped 30 apprenticeships schemes across the EU, and they identified three main types of apprenticeship schemes. Two distinct purposes and functions, plus a hybrid one, are attached to apprenticeships and exist side by side:

- Function group A: Apprenticeships have a clear and established education and training function. They aim at providing people with full competence and capability in an occupation or trade. In this group the apprenticeship system is distinct from the school-based VET system. The apprenticeship qualification is unique to apprenticeship training and is a trademark on the labour market.
- Function group B: Apprenticeships have mixed education and employment functions and are a type of VET delivery within the formal VET system. In this group, apprenticeships share the same purpose and scope as other types of VET delivery and may replace or complement them, possibly to bring VET closer to the labour market. Generally, qualifications do not specify if achieved in apprenticeship or other types of VET delivery. The value of the qualification is given by its learning outcomes and not by the way the training is organised and delivered.
- Function group C: Apprenticeships are offered to young people (often those at risk of social exclusion) as a way of acquiring skills by including them into the labour market. Hybrid function group C combines elements of groups A and B but does not fully fall under either of the two¹².

Hence, as stated in a Cedefop publication on the topic, *'Europe does not – and should not – have a single model of apprenticeship. Similarly, no model can simply be copied: the conditions enabling quality apprenticeships differ from country to country. They not only relate to the structure of national industry, social partnership and economic governance models, but also to shared social and cultural values and the existence of a social contract between the different labour market actors'*¹³.

Consequently, while it is important to have a clear and common understanding of the different types of apprenticeships in work-based learning, it should also be noted that very different forms of work-based learning can improve employment prospects for young people and be a starting point for developing high-level skills identified by employers as necessary for growth and increased productivity.

¹⁰ Synthesis of multiple sources, incl. ILO <https://www.ilo.org/skills/areas/work-based-learning/lang--en/index.htm>, and Cedefop

¹¹ Apprenticeship schemes in European countries: A cross-nation overview. Cedefop 2018. https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/4166_en.pdf

¹² *ibid*

¹³ Apprenticeships: A pill for every ill? https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/9155_en.pdf

High-quality apprenticeships and work-based learning require a high level of employer engagement

The European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships (EFQEA) emphasises the key role of employers to ensure high-quality apprenticeships. Inter alia, the EFQEA stipulates that:

- A substantial part of the apprenticeship, meaning at least half of it, should be carried out in the workplace, with the other half taking part in a VET school.
- A set of comprehensive learning outcomes defined in accordance with national legislation should be agreed by the employers and vocational education and training institutions and, where appropriate, trade unions.
- Apprentices should be paid or otherwise compensated, in line with national or sectoral requirements or collective agreements where they exist, considering arrangements on cost-sharing between employers and public authorities. (...) The host workplace should comply with relevant rules and regulations on working conditions, in particular health and safety legislation.
- In-company trainers and mentors should be designated and tasked to cooperate closely with vocational education and training institutions and teachers to provide guidance to apprentices and to ensure mutual and regular feedback¹⁴.
- The educational value of apprenticeships should be safeguarded, and there should be a clear focus on long-term employability and lifelong learning rather than short-term employment goals.
- Apprenticeship schemes should be resilient to external pressures (e.g. be an integral part of the VET system, based on social dialogue and stable agreements between social partners).

Despite the demands this creates for the role of employers in vocational education and training, EU-level employer organisations (SME United, Business Europe) are positive about the return-on-investment and largely support work-based learning and apprenticeships. In their view, it is the best way to ensure a well-qualified workforce, especially in the crafts sector and for SMEs, as apprenticeships directly connect education and the labour market and facilitate the acquisition of the skills required by companies¹⁵. Yet, employer organisations also underline the crucial role of support that is highly necessary for employers to engage in apprenticeships:

- In-company-teachers, trainers and mentors, especially in micro-, small and medium-sized companies, might need specific training related to teaching methods, and would benefit from extra resources to find the time needed for the training of apprentices, in addition to their job tasks.

¹⁴ Cf: Criteria 2, 4, 5, 6 and 7 of the [Recommendation](#).

¹⁵ Liliane Volozinzkis, Director for Social Affairs and Training Policy, SME United, at the joint [EAFI-ILO High Level Conference organised on 15-16 March 2021](#).

- VET providers, on the other hand, might need financial support to acquire the latest technology that is used in real-life scenarios, and VET teachers need training to be able to operate the equipment and machinery¹⁶.

ESF+ funding plays a key role in this regard due to its function of fostering key investments to facilitate transitions from education and training to work.

ESF-funding has proven to be a key policy instrument for promoting and implementing work-based learning and apprenticeships

The 2018 Council Recommendation on a European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships (EFQEA) stated that the European Commission will support the member states to implement the EFQEA through relevant EU funding.

The evaluation of progress with the implementation of the EFQEA¹⁷ shows that between 2018-2021, financial support for the development of apprenticeships in the EU was provided through several European Structural and Investment Funds (2014-2020), in particular the ESF and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)¹⁸. Overall member states allocated EUR 7 billion from their ESF 2014-2020 resources for strengthening vocational education and training systems, including dual learning systems and apprenticeship schemes, to good effect. The EAFQA progress evaluation shows that since 2018, 11 member states reported apprenticeship reforms or amendments to existing apprenticeships legislation¹⁹:

- **Comprehensive reforms** took place in three countries: in Belgium-Flanders where a new decree on dual learning provides a legislative framework for apprenticeships in secondary education; in Finland with the new VET Act integrating work-based learning into the VET system; and in Lithuania that created a common understanding and framework for the implementation of VET in the form of apprenticeship training.
- **Amendments to existing legislation** took place in eight countries: Austria, aiming at shorter VET training and inter-company training; in Bulgaria with new requirements to ensure quality and a regular update of school curricula; in Croatia where the Act on VET was amended and an experimental dual education programme was launched; in Hungary where the role of chambers in matching pupils to companies was strengthened; in Luxembourg, where the rights and duties of apprentices were clarified; in Malta, where six new apprenticeship programmes were launched; in the Netherlands where VET institutions are now free to offer a great variety of minors; and in Poland, where amendments aimed to restore the prestige of VET and adjust the sectoral VET school system to the needs of the modern economy.

¹⁶ ibid

¹⁷ COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT Putting into practice the European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships – implementation of the Council Recommendation by member states, page 15-18

¹⁸ Additionally, the Erasmus+ programme, the Union programme for the Competitiveness of Enterprises and Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (COSME), the Union Programme for Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI), and the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI) have also been important drivers of supporting apprenticeships,

¹⁹ COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT Putting into practice the European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships – implementation of the Council Recommendation by member states, page 16ff

Other countries have outlined plans and have established new support measures:

- Two member states reported developing **new plans concerning apprenticeships and VET** (Ireland, Spain). In Spain, for example, the government adopted a new plan for the modernisation of VET in July 2020, and in Ireland, a successor to the current Action Plan on Apprenticeships and Traineeships is currently being prepared.
- Six member states created **supporting measures for VET provisions** (Belgium-Wallonia, Denmark, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden). For example, cooperation agreements to increase the attractiveness of VET were created in Denmark (enhancing the involvement of employers, local authorities, and other actors already at primary and lower secondary levels to raise children's appetite towards VET) and in Slovenia (promotional campaigns for VET).
- Two member states established **expert groups in support of apprenticeships** (Italy, Spain).
- Four member states provided **financial support measures for VET institutions and companies** to develop and offer apprenticeships (Czechia, France, Latvia, Sweden).

A high number of countries have used the ESF for promoting dual VET and developing pilot projects (e.g., to provide apprenticeships, improve material conditions of training, raise awareness, support companies, broaden partnership between VET institutions and companies, or implement specific EFQEA criteria). Examples are presented in the box below.

Several member states reported using the ESF+ for the project 'Support for the system of dual education' (2020-2023), which targets schools in dual system that receive financial support for training in foreign languages and design of training programmes, pedagogical support and involvement of social partners. The ESF+ has provided resources for training apprentices, apprentices' salaries, providing apprentices with social security, covering travel costs from VET institution to companies, etc. For example, in Croatia, it is currently implemented through the Operational Programme 'Promoting education for the related crafts based on the apprenticeship system – PHASE II', and in Romania, through the 'Professional Scholarship' project, implemented by the National Centre for Technical and Vocational Education and Training Development.

Further examples include Belgium-Flanders, where the ESF has supported policy reform in the area of dual learning. In the 2014-2020 period, the ESF financed several pilot projects for the development of new dual learning pathways in secondary education and more recently also in higher education²⁰. In Spain, the ESF project 'Technical support to improve the quality of dual VET in the Spanish education system' aims to create expertise and support Spanish authorities to define and implement appropriate processes, methodologies, and data collection strategies. In France, the 2014-2020 ESF operational programmes have provided support to the development and improvement of the quality of apprenticeship schemes under the investment priority 10.3.

²⁰ <https://www.duaalleren.vlaanderen>

In Germany, the ESF has supported young people in taking up apprenticeships through various measures both at federal and regional level, including a programme to integrate asylum seekers and refugees through apprenticeships²¹. In Latvia the ESF has supported the increase of the number of students in qualified educational institutions following their participation in work-based learning or employer-led practical training and training placements²².

The COVID-19 crisis puts an additional strain on employers, and the availability of apprenticeships is at risk – ESF+ funding is crucial to mitigate the risks

Employers need support to continue their engagement during the current pandemic situation and beyond. In April 2020, the Cedefop community of apprenticeship experts launched an internal consultation about [‘How European countries are managing apprenticeships under the current global health emergency due to the COVID-19 crisis’](#). Responses show that due to the two learning venues involved in apprenticeships - education and training institutions and companies – apprenticeships are put at risk by the COVID-19 crisis. The COVID-19 crisis is expected to have a strong impact on the availability of apprenticeships opportunities and, possibly – due to changing priorities - on the sustainability of many VET and apprenticeships reforms and initiatives that were on the agenda of countries before the pandemic.

The European Commission priority is to support member states to sustain the above-mentioned reforms and maintain a stable offer for apprenticeship placements to ensure opportunities for the young generation. It will be even more important to mobilise all available funding, including from ESF+ and the Recovery Plan for Europe. This is reflected in the [European Skills Agenda](#) which stresses the need for massive funding investment in skills, including as part of the ‘Recovery Plan for Europe’. The ESF+ remains the main EU fund for investing in skills with a budget of EUR 99.3 billion in the Multi-annual Financial Framework 2021-2027. It is expected that approximately one-third of the available resources will be invested in education and skills, including apprenticeships.

One of the suggestions from the European Commission online survey ‘Fight against COVID-19²³’, launched in the framework of EU VET Week 2020, highlights the key role of ESF: *‘ESF to fund educational technology, training for teachers and trainers, transfer of shared good practices in policy making and implementing e-learning, using technology in education and training. Support to boost cooperation between all sectors, public and private²⁴.’*

ESF+ funding can contribute to mitigating the consequences of the COVID-19 crisis in several ways. For instance, it can be used to

²¹ COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT Putting into practice the European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships – implementation of the Council Recommendation by member states, page 17

²² *ibid*

²³ https://ec.europa.eu/social/vocational-skills-week/fight-against-covid-19_en

²⁴ Quality Apprenticeships: A need for ESF Transnational Cooperation. ESF Transnational Cooperation Network ‘Learning and Skills’, 12th meeting results and recommendations. Final paper: September 2020

- prevent a decline of apprenticeship places through financial support to training companies, including the substitution of apprenticeship wages and other costs
- develop hybrid learning formats that include face-to face learning in school and at the workplace as well as distance learning using digital tools. For instance, in Belgium-Flanders, a call was launched in 2020 on developing such forms of hybrid learning. Inter alia, this resulted in an e-learning platform on cultural diversity in the care and welfare sector that is intergrated into a blended learning approach²⁵. Finland has invested in using virtual reality and simulator technology in VET, for instance in the practical training of timber truck drivers²⁶.
- ensure the continuity of initiatives and reforms, e.g. by funding pilot initiatives to trial and test new approaches.

Experiences from the national level should be further shared and discussed in the ESF Transnational Cooperation Platform, with a view to emerging conclusions on the types of projects and tools that have proven to be successful in that regard. The Recommendations emerging from previous discussions, including the work of the ESF Transnational Cooperation Network 'Learning and Skills', and a Peer Review of the CoP Employment, Skills and Education, are presented in the next section.

2. Recommendations for managing authorities and intermediate bodies

The Peer Review on employer engagement in work-based learning and apprenticeships (June 2021) confirmed that ESF+ managing authorities can be key players to develop and strengthen partnership with employers to support the development of work-based learning and apprenticeships and at all governance levels - from the national, to the regional and local level - and to enhance its quality and attractiveness.

This applies particularly to the area of employer engagement, which can be a bottleneck for the establishment of more and better work-based learning opportunities. Recommendations for ESF+ implementation that were gathered during the Peer Review with the members of the CoP Employment, Skills and Education are presented below.

Facilitate employer engagement through strategic partnerships: managing authorities should establish close work relationships with employers and social partners to build structural collaboration

There are many stakeholders involved in work-based learning and apprenticeships and it is important that they work together. As stipulated in the Recommendation on a European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships (EFQEA), measures to facilitate better understanding and collaboration between the two worlds are needed.

²⁵ <https://www.vivosocialprofit.org/cultuursensitief-omgaan-met-clienten-en-collegas>

²⁶ [Upper Savo Vocational College](#), a video example can be found [here](#) (in Finnish language)

Yet, building such professional relationships and coordination structures take time and resources to develop.

Much effort is already made in the EU countries to establish strong relationships between key stakeholders and to strengthen work-based learning and apprenticeships with the help of the ESF+. Managing authorities can help to facilitate commitment at structural/stakeholder level and bring the world of work and the world of education closer together. **'National apprenticeship coalitions', hence partnership of all relevant stakeholders, especially VET providers, and social partners at regional and local level** have proven particularly useful: Experiences show that programmes are more easily accepted when social partners and sectoral organisations are involved. Moreover, partnerships and coalitions at regional and local level ensure that programmes and learning outcomes are in line with the needs of the labour market. Examples presented during the Peer Review have shown that strategic collaboration with labour market stakeholders is of added value.

Examples of managing authorities that coordinate with stakeholders to develop joined-up approaches and synergies are manifold.

In **Belgium-Flanders**, dual VET is relatively new. VET schools, employers and sector organisations have consultations early in the planning process and VET students have a right to a mentor, no matter the size of their host employer. Sector-specific organisations are responsible for the training of mentors in companies within their sector as they have specialist knowledge of the working conditions and labour market needs. This can lead to specialised training and variations in the content. The ESF+ managing authority supports the development and implementation of such trainings.

In **Bulgaria**, apprenticeships were implemented only recently. Schools and companies have started offering dual vocational training after the amendments to the VET Act in 2014. Furthermore, under the amended VET Act, the dual training system is a specific form of VET based on a signed contract between one or more employers and a VET institution. The 'Domino' pilot project (2015-2019) was launched with the aim of introducing dual training in Bulgaria based on the Swiss model. At the beginning of 2020, the project 'Support of dual system of training' started under the ESF/ERDF Operational Programme 'Science and Education for Smart Growth'.

The activities of this project target schools in-company trainers and teachers in the dual training system and focus on trades protected by the state and sectors with labour market shortages.

In **Czechia**, cooperation structures between central administrative bodies, relevant ministries and social partners are being set up. Moreover, the cooperation developed between schools, companies and partners led to the elaboration of school education programmes.

In **Latvia**, in the next financial period (2021-2027), it is planned to further increase the involvement of social partners by strengthening the capacity of Sector Expert Councils (SECs), that can feed into the sectoral methodological capacity of VET institutions. Under the envisaged college reform, it is foreseen to introduce apprenticeship (work-based learning) also at a college level (EQF level 5) in Latvia.

The Peer Review showed that ESF+ managing authorities can have a very active role. For instance, they can act as a broker between key actors of the labour market and the education and training sector, facilitating the collaboration between PES, sector

organisations, education and training providers by sharing knowledge and connections. In that sense, they can act as '*learning organisations*', testing what works and what doesn't, communicating about lessons learnt and promoting successful and innovative approaches to help achieve higher quality in work-based learning and apprenticeships.

However, the Peer Review also showed that *financial support and incentives to companies* with the ESF+ remain an area to engage in as they have proven useful to facilitate employer engagement in work-based learning.

Support SMEs: Financial incentives can be an important stimulus, especially for SMEs and micro-companies

Apprenticeships bear costs for employers. There are direct costs, e.g., wages for apprentices and costs related to training (including those related to health and safety regulations), as well as indirect costs such as working time of experienced employees acting as trainers and in-company mentors, or administrative costs.

ESF+ can assist in reducing the burden on the side of the employers by providing financial support and incentives to companies to facilitate their engagement in work-based learning. Managing authorities have experiences with financial support for companies, especially SMEs, with regards to:

- Financial compensation for training efforts, including for setting up a systematic, structured, and strategic approach to training,
- Wage substitution for staff that cannot be fully utilised by the company due to training obligations; and
- Financial compensation for apprenticeship remuneration.

In **Croatia**, the ESF-financed 'Promoting education for the related crafts based on the apprenticeship system–PHASE II' project provided over 4,100 scholarships and over 425 grants to companies (crafts and legal entities) between 2019 and 2020²⁷.

In **Lithuania**, the Ministry of Education, Science and Sports collaborated with other ministries to develop calls for proposals to promote employer engagement in two-year apprenticeship programmes. To apply, VET training institutes must be cooperating with an employer. Five VET schools have been awarded funding, and the participating sectors include welding, construction, catering and the automotive sector. The ESF+ funds are used to cover learners' allowances, which are a maximum of 40% of the national minimum wage, travel and accommodation (if needed), insurance, and other expenses. Within the programme, identified staff attend a 'train-the-trainers' course.

As informed, also administrative cost exist for companies implementing apprenticeships. Companies do not always have a full picture of the entire process and first-time training companies are often overwhelmed by emerging administrative issues like training contracts, taxation, healthcare, social security, etc., especially in the case of minors. While this is cumbersome for medium and large companies, SMEs and micro-companies

²⁷ <https://mingor.gov.hr/>

are easily discouraged as they do not have enough capacity to cover such administrative aspects.

Some countries have set up projects that provide advice and support to all involved.

In **Germany**, in the Hesse region, a mobile consultancy service ('QuABB')²⁸ has been set up. So-called 'apprenticeship advisors' work with companies, VET providers and learners alike:

- The QuABB advisors support young learners to complete their apprenticeship training and cope with any difficulties that may arise throughout.
- The advisors support teachers in case of complex problems and provide a variety of work materials and practical aids
- Support from the advisors is also available to companies moderating conflicts and accompany learners through difficult phases during their training period.

In **Spain** there is a 'prospector' - a person who knows the students - that inspects the employer to assess their potential for a high-quality apprenticeship or work-based learning experience and supports the in-company teacher and trainer.

Yet, governmental incentives – including through the ESF+ – can only be meant to provide initial seed funding. In the long run, a company's decision to engage in work-based learning and apprenticeships will be determined by the cost-benefit ratio of such an investment compared to other alternatives of securing skilled workers.

Empirical evidence from studies in Germany and Switzerland²⁹ shows that in a well-functioning apprenticeship system, a large share of training firms can recoup their training investments by the end of the training period. Moreover, as training firms often succeed in retaining the most suitable apprentices, offering apprenticeships is an attractive strategy to recruit their future skilled work force.

ESF+ managing authorities should also explore the possibilities of pre-employment pathways for those furthest from the labour market. *Groups at risk of social exclusion*, including learners that have learning difficulties or face barriers entering the labour market because of mental or physical health issues; disabilities; migrant backgrounds; and young people that were previously not in employment, education or training (NEETs), can benefit from apprenticeships and work-based learning. Yet, programmes designed for at-risk groups may require higher efforts from all actors involved: employers, VET centres, teachers, trainers, and in-company mentors. ESF+ programmes can be instrumental in preparing the different groups of actors for their roles and responsibilities and provide additional resources to help them perform successfully.

²⁸ <https://www.quabb-hessen.de/>

²⁹ Dionisius R, Muehlemann S, Pfeifer H, Walden G, Wenzelmann F, Wolter SC: Cost and benefit of apprenticeship training: a comparison of Germany and Switzerland. 2009; and CEDEFOP: [Benefits of Vocational Education and Training in Europe for People, Organisations and Countries](#). Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg; 2013.

Provide support to a variety of actors: national programmes should support all parties involved to carry out their roles and responsibilities in a collaborative manner

Support for in-company teachers, trainers and mentors is usually required, and covered by the ESF+, in two aspects.

- Numerous managing authorities provide financial support for tailored training for in-company teachers, trainers and mentors. For example, this can cover training related to pedagogical skills and teaching methods needed to work with young learners and learners who have additional needs such as students with disabilities or those who may be at risk of social exclusion. Well-trained in-company trainers, teachers and mentors may therefore be more competent at the job, be more motivated and better equipped to support students through their work-based learning and apprenticeships.
- Some managing authorities also provide funds for extra resources, so that in-company trainers, teachers and mentors find the time needed for the training of apprentices, in addition to their job tasks.

VET providers, on the other hand, might need financial support to stay abreast of innovations and technological developments in their sector. Financial support can help them to acquire the latest technology that is used in real-life, and VET teachers need training to be able to operate the equipment and machinery³⁰.

Beyond that, close collaboration between the learning venues (VET provider and employer) is important to support the overall quality of the learning experience, and the learning outcomes. ESF+ projects can contribute to strengthening the collaboration and establishing a clear and common understanding of the joint roles and responsibilities.

In **Czechia**, so-called coordinators of cooperation between schools and companies were introduced, using the experience from ESF+ projects as part of professional counselling for pupils and introducing training of professional pedagogical staff in companies.

In **Finland**, the training offered to in-company teachers and trainers covers technical content as well as communication skills, interpersonal and pedagogical skills that are specific to working with young people without prior work experience. For example, this can include aspects such as timekeeping; dealing with difficult situations; and age-specific learning processes. Such ideas have been captured by the managing authority in Finland as there is no overall system to train in-company teachers and trainers available.

In **Lithuania**, the roles and responsibilities are defined for both learning venues: each student is assigned a 'tutor', based at the VET school, and a 'mentor' within the companies, and it is important for each of them to understand each other's' perspectives so that they can develop the work-based learning programme applying a holistic perspective. A scheme was introduced for VET tutors to gain experience within the private sector, and thus develop a better understanding of employers' needs. In

³⁰ *ibid*

addition, the training for company mentors is funded and organised by the ESF+ and the Lithuanian Ministry of Education.

In **Slovenia**, a 24-hour initial training programme for trainers in companies was revised in 2016 to update the knowledge and competences required to plan, provide and assess workplace learning. The training programme was offered for free within the ESF project 'Training mentors 2016-21' coordinated by the Biotechnical Educational Centre Ljubljana (BIC) and the School Centre Kranj. The Ministry of Education, Science and Sport was stimulating companies to take part in the training of upper-secondary vocational and higher vocational students. The incentives were co-financed by the ESF programme 'Co-financing incentives for employers to provide work-based learning in educational programmes leading to a vocational qualification'. Incentives were meant for employers to provide on-the-job practical training of upper secondary vocational and short-cycle higher vocational students and apprentices. In 2018 and 2019, nearly 2,000 mentors completed the training programme; and in the school year 2018/2019, employers received financial incentives for 51 apprentices and in the school year 2019/2020 for 119 apprentices.

The Peer Review also showed that some countries face challenges regarding the quality, efficiency and 'image' of work-based learning and apprenticeships. By launching calls for proposals around work-based learning, managing authorities can contribute to wider actions to support the attractiveness of work-based learning. Hence, awareness raising for the opportunities of VET and work-based learning is important and can be implemented with the help of the ESF+. This should be in line with the most pertinent national challenges. Depending on the specific situation in the country, these can differ across the member states.

Focus on national challenges with apprenticeships and work-based learning: national ESF+ programmes can support national efforts to improve the quality, efficiency and image of work-based learning and apprenticeships

As mentioned above, in many countries, there are ongoing reforms to address challenges related to the quality, efficiency and 'image' of work-based learning and apprenticeships, to ensure they are high-quality learning pathways with a positive image. The obstacles to overcome can be clustered into traditional, actual and future challenges.

- **'Traditional' challenges** relate to the tradition of VET and work-based learning in a country. They can include an unappealing image of VET, work-based learning and apprenticeships as a career path that results in a preference for school-based pathways.

ESF+ programmes addressing these challenges aim to change students and their parents' perception of VET, work-based learning and apprenticeships as a career choice, supporting actions that can contribute to improving the image and enhancing attractiveness of VET and certain sectors.

In **Greece**, VET can be entered upon completion of (vocational) secondary education is completed. However, despite several attempts to improve the quality of VET through the development of infrastructure and human resources

(teachers), VET remains inefficient: there is a high percentage of early leavers and a weak link with labour market needs.

In 2016, the Greek government decided to address this issue by establishing an option of dual learning as an alternative path that would allow graduates to enter the labour market with higher practical skills. The programme supports employers with wage subsidies and social security contributions of up to 45%, using ESF money. The introduction of the new dual apprenticeship training pathway was accompanied by other measures, including increased cooperation between stakeholders, enhanced teacher training, pilot projects, etc³¹.

- **'Actual' challenges** relate to working conditions and career prospects. They can include a lack of regulation regarding the working conditions of apprentices (working overtime, low or no wages, health and safety issues), especially when they are underaged, or a lack of gender parity in specific sectors. They can also include a lack of opportunities for career advancement, e.g. because apprenticeship programmes are not pegged to National Qualifications Frameworks, or do not lead to recognised qualifications. Actual challenges can also be related to employers' views that VET graduates do not acquire the right skills during their training, which hinders their employability (outdated professional techniques, lack of basic skills, lack of soft and personal skills).

ESF+ programmes addressing actual challenges aim to put in place tripartite regulations and agreements between employers, VET providers and social partners that clarify the term and condition for all parties involved, or work on flexible pathways to ensure career progression in the long term. They can also aim to specify the learning outcomes from work-based learning, to ensure that learners acquire the skills required by employers.

In **Lithuania**, ESF-funded projects have run since November 2016 to support apprenticeship-type training projects. A 2017 legal reform emphasised the importance of workplace-based learning and apprenticeships. In 2018, only 2% of VET learners were learning through an apprenticeship. To achieve the 20% target, several measures were launched, including

- A new type of apprenticeship contract that is based on 'learning outcomes' rather than on training content. This gives employers greater flexibility to adapt training plans to their business and production models, and react to technological change and innovation;
- Training schemes for company employees to improve their pedagogical skills; and
- Financial incentives including subsidies for apprenticeship wages³².

- **'Future' challenges** refer to anticipated developments (e.g. digital and green transitions) in the labour market or in certain sectors. The training force needs to be adapted to new market needs (including green and digital transitions), which results in challenges related to putting in place new qualification programmes and develop work-based learning schemes that are closely tailored to the needs of innovative sectors. The ESF+ can be a highly valuable instrument to support the

³¹ Cf. 11th meeting of the ESF Thematic Network on Learning and Skills, 25-26 June 2019, Madrid: Minutes

³² *ibid*

development of new and innovative approaches e.g. by engaging with new sectors. The ESF+ can help by funding pilot projects or innovative approaches that contribute to making this change happen³³.

Using ESF funding, the I.E.S Rey Don Garcia VET in the La Rioja region in **Spain** provider has developed several dual training pathways in the renewable energy sector and worked with employers to develop innovative research projects. The Higher Degree of Renewable Energies has been implemented since 2015. The project was born by an initiative of the teaching staff of the centre I.E.S Rey Don García who realised that there was a need by the sector and companies in the region for trained workers and apprentices. Companies within the region offered to collaborate and were able to host the apprentices. Dual learning was regarded as an ideal setting as it combines the benefits of two learning venues: theoretical learning at the VET centre, and practical learning in the company. ESF+ funding is used in two ways:

- To finance the working hours of teachers working with the apprentices in the school.
- To finance activities related to the collaboration between company, teachers and apprentices, and to enhance mutual understanding and exchange.

During the two-year cycle, the apprentices go through sectors as diverse as wind, photovoltaic, and electric power distribution. The course consists of several modules per year, that are shared between the VET provider and different companies, relevant to the topic. Learners get the opportunity for several months of work-based learning in each sector through three placements (one per sector)³⁴.

Managing authorities should have a detailed understanding of the most pertinent challenges regarding the quality, efficiency and image of work-based learning and apprenticeships in their country and should tailor their programmes accordingly, factoring in their countries' level of maturity with apprenticeships and wbl.

That way, ESF+ funding can efficiently contribute to implementing national reforms in vocational education and training. ESF+ programmes can be tailored to trial and test pilot initiatives to establish new apprenticeship schemes, special target groups or apprenticeship support initiatives. Accompanied by monitoring and followed by independent evaluations, such programmes can contribute to the reforms.

Build on what is there: A variety of work-based learning and apprenticeship formats exist. ESF+ funding plays an important role at every level of maturity.

As mentioned in the previous section, a broad variety of work-based learning and apprenticeship formats exist across the EU, most of them integrated are in the VET

³³ Cf. Background paper drafted for the ESF TCP (EES CoP) Peer Review on Employer Engagement in Apprenticeships.

³⁴ Cf. Background paper drafted for the ESF TCP (EES CoP) Peer Review on Employer Engagement in Apprenticeships.

system.³⁵ Yet, while some countries have more mature systems than others, ESF+ funding plays an important role at every level of maturity. Funding opportunities can be of use to refine what is there, to gradually build up more experience and maturity. They can however also be used to maintain and further improve quality in countries with well-functioning systems.

There is no 'ideal' type of work-based learning and apprenticeship, and ESF+ programmes do not need to apply a 'normative' approach modelled after the most mature apprenticeship systems. Both informal and regulated apprenticeship systems are important learning resources enabling young people to gain skills and experiences, leading directly to – or getting closer to - recognised qualifications. Countries will have to define specific policy priorities in line with their plans to invest in their skills base, promote economic growth and enhance the employability of young people. This can include extending formal apprenticeship schemes as well as upgrading informal opportunities, e.g., for certain hard-to-reach target groups like low-skilled adults in employment. In most countries, several forms of work-based learning and apprenticeships exist in parallel, and they might equally benefit from an additional boost through ESF+ programmes.

The managing authority in **Italy** has launched two calls for proposals, in 2017 and 2018, on work-based learning. The calls target VET colleges (ITS, in Italy) and Italian high schools to provide work-based learning to students in the last three years of schooling or who are in VET colleges. The calls for proposals provide funding for four types of work-based learning:

- activities concerning the production chain;
- establishment of networks;
- interregional work-based learning experiences; and
- work-based learning placements abroad.

The activities have an overall budget of EUR 190 million. The managing authority has an agreement in place with the federation of Italian employers and the Italian chambers of commerce. Social partners are involved through the design of the calls for proposals.

A different approach has been taken in **Greece** where ESF funding has been used to support their pilot post-secondary year apprenticeship programme since 2016. The programme is available to students who have a secondary education diploma and who are aged over 18 years. The programme is led by the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs. The approach has involved social partners from the start, and they have had several meetings with large companies to promote and secure their involvement in the programme. The apprenticeship programme was introduced to boost popularity of VET, as university tends to be the first choice for many young learners although there is a need for trained, skilled staff with VET qualifications.

In **Estonia**, ESF funding has been used since 2015 to popularise and expand workplace-based learning. Under the ESF project 'PRÕM', a pilot on quality assessment of the workplace-based learning process in schools started in 2019. It will continue in the next ESF+ programming period as 'PRÕM+'. The project will expand priority fields and target groups including youth, people with special educational needs and SMEs. It will also focus on improving the quality and accessibility of work-based

³⁵ Cf. Cedefop's [European database on apprenticeship schemes](#)

learning, as well as the cooperation of employers and educational institutions in developing an internship system and work-based learning³⁶.

In **Latvia**, the ESF is the key policy instrument to promote apprenticeships. The main developments in Latvia relate to the simplification of the costs, implementation and reporting mechanisms of a 2018 ESF project on work-based learning³⁷, for instance simplifying reporting to increase support to companies involved in the provision of tutors in the work-based learning and training practices.

Strengthen cooperation: Greater efforts are needed to link the work of the ESF+ interventions at all governance levels with other European initiatives including the European Alliance for Apprenticeships

In July 2002, the [European Alliance of Apprenticeships \(EAfA\)](#) was renewed and embedded in the Pact for Skills as announced in the European Skills Agenda for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience. The main objective of the Pact is to mobilise and incentivise all relevant stakeholders to take concrete actions for the upskilling and reskilling of the workforce by pooling efforts and setting up partnerships to address the needs of the labour market, thus supporting green and digital transitions as well as local, regional growth strategies. Governments, social partners, businesses, chambers, regions, youth organisations, VET providers, but also individual actors, partnerships and think tanks have committed to concrete actions.

Managing authorities may find it beneficial to join the EAfA, tap into the knowledge and experience gathered there, and participate in the ongoing knowledge exchange, dialogue, and mutual learning activities. Managing authorities could gather intelligence and discuss funding needs, opportunities, and national prioritisations. For instance, the renewed EAfA's Action Plan addresses six priorities, one of which echoes the topics discussed in the CoP Employment Education and Skills on employer engagement, particularly regarding incentivising support to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in providing a stable supply of quality and effective apprenticeships. This situation was aggravated during the COVID-crisis. In response, some member states have already called upon employers to step up their efforts in preserving apprenticeship offers, e.g. through financial aid.³⁸

3. Conclusions

ESF managing authorities can be key players to develop and strengthen partnership with employers to support the development of work-based learning and apprenticeships and at the national and local level and to enhance its quality and attractiveness.

³⁶ Programme 'The systematic development of the practical training and apprenticeship learning in VET and HE' (PRÖM), See: <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/data-visualisations/apprenticeshipschemes/country-fiches/estonia>

³⁷ ESF project "On the participation of VET learners in apprenticeships and training in companies". Available at: <http://www.lddk.lv/projekts/darba-vide-balstitas-macibas/>, implemented by the Employers' Confederation of Latvia

³⁸ <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=1148&furtherNews=yes&newsId=10057>

National ESF+ managing authorities discussed their mutual experiences during a Peer Review of the ESF Transnational Platform (Community of Practice Employment, Education and Skills) in June 2021. The CoP Employment, Education and Skills was able to build on the work done by the ESF Transnational Cooperation Platform Thematic Network 'Learning and Skills' over the course of 2019 and 2020.

Managing authorities concluded that over the last decade, the ESF+ has proven to be an invaluable instrument for governments as well as practitioners implementing reforms to enhance the quality, effectiveness and image of work-based learning and apprenticeships in line with EU frameworks. Yet, more needs to be done: programmes that have proven to be effective need to be continued, and, additionally, ESF+ managing authorities should be encouraged to explore new formats and areas of support.

The following key conclusions emerge from the previous sections:

- **Facilitate employer engagement through strategic partnerships: Managing authorities should establish close work relationships with employers and social partners to build structural collaboration.** Examples of projects and programmes show that funding that is directed at individual employers or local clusters tend to have a very positive impact yet are of limited scope and longevity. To achieve long-term commitment and structural change, managing authorities can help to bring the world of work and the world of education closer together. 'National apprenticeship coalitions', hence partnerships of especially VET providers, stakeholders, and social partners at regional and local level have proven particularly useful. Experiences show that programmes are more easily accepted when social partners and sectoral organisations are involved. Moreover, partnerships and coalitions at regional and local level ensure that programmes and learning outcomes are in line with the needs of the regional labour market. Examples presented during the Peer Review have shown that strategic collaboration with labour market stakeholders is of great value.
- **Support SMEs: Financial incentives can be an important stimulus, especially for small, medium and micro-sized companies.** There are many examples across the EU where ESF+ funding is alleviating the financial burden for companies by substituting direct costs like apprenticeship wages. This is an important incentive especially for SMEs and will remain invaluable especially considering the financial aftermath from the COVID-19 pandemic. Yet, there are more and varied opportunities to use the ESF+ as financial incentive: Indirect costs related to administrative issues like preparing training contracts, taxation, healthcare, social security, etc., can be cumbersome for medium and large companies, and small, medium and micro-sized companies are easily discouraged as they do not have enough capacity and human resources to cover such administrative burdens. Some countries have set up projects that provide advice and support through specially trained 'apprenticeship advisors' that help companies to overcome the challenges.
- **Provide support to a variety of actors: National programmes should support all parties to carry out their roles and responsibilities in a collaborative manner.** Apprenticeships and work-based learning are based on structured collaboration between the world of work and the education sector. For the system to succeed, both sides rely on each other, Well-structured forms of collaboration help to ensure that the mix of theory and practice that makes work-based learning and apprenticeships so appealing can unfold to maximum effect. ESF+ programmes can be instrumental in preparing the different groups of actors

for their roles and responsibilities and provide additional resources to help them perform successfully.

- **Focus on national challenges with apprenticeships and work-based learning: national ESF+ programmes can support the national efforts to improve the quality, efficiency and image of work-based learning and apprenticeships.** Managing authorities should have a detailed understanding of the ongoing efforts in their country to improve the quality, efficiency and image of work-based learning and apprenticeships in their country. In some countries that means addressing challenges related to the image of VET and apprenticeships, in other countries issues may be related to the quality and the outcomes, for instance in relation to the labour market relevance of graduate's skills. Programmes should be tailored accordingly and can play a key role in driving reforms.
- **ESF+ funding can contribute to implementing national reforms in vocational education and training.** ESF+ programmes can be tailored to trial and test pilot initiatives to establish new apprenticeship schemes, special target groups or apprenticeship support initiatives. Accompanied by monitoring and followed by independent evaluation, such programmes can contribute to the sustainability of reforms.
- **Build on what is there: A variety of work-based learning and apprenticeship formats exist, and all of them can be important learning opportunities. ESF+ funding plays an important role at every level of maturity.** While some countries have more mature apprenticeship systems than others, there is no 'ideal' type of work-based learning and apprenticeship. Both informal and regulated apprenticeship systems are important learning resources enabling young people to gain skills and experiences, leading directly to – or getting closer to – recognised qualifications and skills that provide 'currency' on the labour market. Funding opportunities can be of use to refine what is there, to gradually build up more experience and maturity. They can however also be used to maintain and further improve quality in countries with well-functioning systems.
- **Strengthen cooperation: Greater efforts are needed to link the work of the ESF+ interventions at all governance levels with other European initiatives including the European Alliance for Apprenticeships.** The European Pact for Skills aims to mobilise and incentivise all relevant stakeholders across the EU to take concrete actions for the upskilling and reskilling of the workforce by pooling efforts and setting up partnerships to address the needs of the labour market, thus supporting green and digital transitions as well as local, regional growth strategies. Through the European Alliance for Apprenticeships (EAfA), governments, social partners, businesses, chambers, regions, youth organisations, VET providers, but also individual actors, partnerships and think tanks have committed to concrete actions. Managing authorities may find it beneficial to join the EAfA, tap into the knowledge and experience gathered there, and participate in the ongoing knowledge exchange, dialogue and mutual learning activities in the EAfA. Managing authorities could gather intelligence and discuss funding needs, opportunities and national prioritisations.

4. Further resources

Policy documents

Council of the European Union: [Recommendation on a European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships \(EFQEA\)](#), March 2018

Council of the European Union: [Council Recommendation on vocational education and training \(VET\)](#), December 2020

Declaration of the Ministers in charge of vocational education and training of the member states, the EU Candidate Countries and the EEA countries, the European social partners and the European Commission: [The Osnabrück Declaration on vocational education and training as an enabler of recovery and just transitions to digital and green economies](#), November 2020

European Commission, DG EMPL: [COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT Putting into practice the European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships – implementation of the Council Recommendation by member states](#), September 2021

Cedefop (2020) [How European countries are managing apprenticeships under the current global health emergency due to the COVID-19 crisis](#). Synthesis report based on information provided by Cedefop community of apprenticeship experts.

Cedefop (2021): [EFQEA implementation: a Cedefop analysis and main findings](#)

Studies and research papers

Cedefop (2017) [Education and labour market outcomes for vocational education and training graduates in different types of VET systems in Europe](#).

Cedefop (2018) [Apprenticeship schemes in European countries: A cross-nation overview](#).

Cedefop (2021) Cedefop Briefing note: [Apprenticeships: A pill for every ill?](#)

Cedefop (2013): [Benefits of Vocational Education and Training in Europe for People, Organisations and Countries](#). Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

Dionisius R, Muehleman S, Pfeifer H, Walden G, Wenzelmann F, Wolter SC (2009): Cost and benefit of apprenticeship training: a comparison of Germany and Switzerland.

European Training Foundation (2018): [Work-based learning: A handbook for policy makers and social partners in ETF partner countries](#)

International Labour Organization (2017): [ILO Toolkit for Quality Apprenticeships - Guide for Policy Makers](#)

Papers produced by the ESF Transnational Cooperation Platform

ESF Transnational Cooperation: Quality Apprenticeships: a need for ESF Transnational Cooperation. 12th meeting results and recommendations - Final paper. September 2020

Databases and virtual libraries

Cedefop: [European database on apprenticeships schemes](#)

Cedefop: [Financing apprenticeships database](#)

European Alliance for Apprenticeships (EAfA): [Apprenticeships online library](#)

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