

Apprenticeship response to the COVID 19 crisis

POLICY DEVELOPMENT

PRACTICAL MEASURE/INITIATIVE

 AUSTRIA

Timeline

2020 **Implementation**

2021 **Implementation**

2022 **Implementation**

2023 **Completed**

ID number 38671

Background

In the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, there were repeated massive restrictions on public life and the provision of business services from March 2020 onwards. On several occasions, entire economic sectors such as tourism, personal services and large areas of commerce had to be closed for several weeks. Production was also massively affected by these restrictions.

Apprenticeship training in these companies was also affected. While parallel vocational school attendance could be continued via home schooling, in many cases in-company training was only possible to a very limited extent in closed companies. It was feared that the companies' willingness to train, not only with regard to agreed apprentice contracts, would decline, but that the number of newly offered apprenticeship positions would also decrease.

Objectives

To maintain the willingness of companies to conclude new training contracts, additional funding is being introduced for training contracts concluded during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The legal basis of apprenticeship training was also adapted to allow short-time work for apprentices to secure and maintain apprenticeships.

Description

To keep the apprenticeship system running, the following two key measures were taken in response to the COVID-19 crisis:

Apprenticeship bonus

Companies that hired apprentices during the coronavirus crisis from 16 March 2020 until 31 October 2020, receive a bonus of EUR 2 000 for each new apprentice, which is paid in two instalments: EUR 1 000 when the apprenticeship starts and EUR 1 000 if the apprenticeship relationship is continued after the probationary period. For apprentices who were taken on

from an inter-company training measure, the deadline was extended to 31 March 2021. The apprenticeship bonus complements existing subsidies for apprenticeship companies.

The apprenticeship offices of the regional economic chambers are responsible for processing the funding. Training companies are actively informed about the funding opportunities by the apprenticeship offices.

Short-time work for apprentices

An amendment to the Vocational Training Act (BAG), by the Federal Ministry of Digital and Economic Affairs, which came into force on 1 May 2020, created the possibility that apprentices could also be registered for short-time work.

Initially, this amendment was limited until 31 August 2020. In October 2020, an extension of short-time work for apprentices until 31 March 2021 was enacted retroactively.

Apprentice's compensation remains fully paid during short-time work, as the short-time work allowance covers the compensation in full. This also applies to a possible extension of the short-time work. Time spent by the apprentice at vocational school during short-time work does not count as lost hours and must continue to be paid by the company.

For the third phase of COVID-19 short-time work, which applied from 1 October 2020, 50% of the lost time had to be used for training or vocationally relevant training measures. Funding was provided for these training measures. This training obligation was suspended for the lock down period.

In Vienna, for example, a new training association model (Viennese training association model for the catering and hotel industry) was developed in the hotel and catering sector to fulfil this training obligation.

While the Public Employment Service and the Federal Ministry of Labour are responsible for the correct implementation and control of the short-time work regulation and apprenticeship training, the Federal Ministry of Digital and Economic Affairs is responsible for creating the legal framework conditions by adapting the Vocational Training Act.

2020 Implementation

The apprenticeship bonus was introduced as a temporary measure for the period 16 March to 31 October 2020. Applications were possible in the period from 1 July to 31 October 2020. For the transfer of apprentices from a supra-company training measure to a company-based apprenticeship, the subsidy will continue until 31 March 2021.

Short-time work for apprentices was introduced in May 2020 and extended in October 2020 initially until 31 March 2021. In parallel, accompanying measures such as support programmes to cover company training costs (apprenticeship bonus) or opportunities to hold the apprenticeship-leaving exam were implemented in 2020.

2021 Implementation

As of January 2021, around EUR 40 million in subsidies have been paid out to apprenticeship training companies within the framework of the apprenticeship bonus. This measure was considered temporary and was discontinued after the defined time period.

Evaluation of the take-up and effectiveness of this funding measure published in 2021 found that the funding was taken up for almost 85% of the apprenticeship contracts agreed in the observation period (16 March to 31 October 2020). If the non-eligible apprenticeship companies are excluded (e.g. public institutions), the share of non-applications was around 9%.

Short-time work for apprentices was originally introduced for a limited period to bridge the lockdown phases due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to the pandemic, with its recurring phases of social distancing, the measure was repeatedly extended analogous

to the general short-time work regulations, most recently for the period 1 July 2021 to 30 June 2022.

2022 Implementation

On 30 June 2022, the short-time work for apprentices expired, after the pandemic situation required no further restrictions on apprenticeship training.

2023 Completed

In 2023, the measures to support apprenticeship training during the COVID-19 pandemic were also ended with the end of the pandemic.

However, the option of part-time apprenticeships, which was not introduced as a 'Covid measure' but supported training during the pandemic, remains in place as originally planned.

Bodies responsible

- Federal Ministry of Labour, Family and Youth (BMAFJ) (until 2021)
- Federal Ministry of Digital and Economic Affairs (BMDW) (until 2022)
- Austrian Public Employment Service (AMS)
- Federal Ministry of Labour (BMA) (until 2022)
- Federal Ministry of Labour and Economy (BMAW) (until 2025)
- Austrian Federal Economic Chamber (WKO)

Target group

Learners

Learners in upper secondary, including apprentices

Entities providing VET

Companies

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)

VET providers (all kinds)

Thematic categories

Governance of VET and lifelong learning

Coordinating VET and other policies

Modernising VET offer and delivery

Reinforcing work-based learning, including apprenticeships

Supporting lifelong learning culture and increasing participation

Financial and non-financial incentives to learners, providers and companies

Subsystem

IVET

Further reading

Related policy developments

2022 Completed

Viennese training association model for the catering and hotel industry

In close cooperation between the Vienna Economic Chamber (WKW), the Vienna Chamber of Labour (AK), the Vienna Public Employment Service and the Vienna Employment Promotion Fund (waff), as well as conceptually supported by the two research institutes ibw and öibf, a model of a new, innovative trai

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Type of development

Practical
measure/Initiative

Subsystem

IVET

2021 Completed

Apprentice Bonus (COVID-19 measure)

To counteract the expected decline in apprenticeships due to COVID-19, those companies that hired apprentices during the coronavirus crisis from 16 March 2020 until 31 October 2020 are being supported with EUR 2 000.

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Type of development

Practical
measure/Initiative

Subsystem

IVET

2025 Implementation

Increasing attractiveness of apprenticeship training

In January 2020, the Austrian parliament passed an amendment to the Vocational Training Act (BAG), jointly developed by the Federal Ministry for Digital and Economic Affairs and the social partners.

Type of development

Regulation/Legislation

Subsystem

IVET

“ ... ” **Cite as**

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<https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/timeline-vet-policies-europe/search/38671>