



## Summary of outcomes

Over 50 participants in Cedefop's Third policy learning forum on apprenticeships had the opportunity to share knowledge and reflect on the experience of other countries in a virtual event on 17 and 18 September.

Participants from 11 countries represented mostly ministries of education and labour or their agencies, national level employers' associations and trade unions, and vocational education and training (VET) providers. The countries taking part were:

- the nine countries involved in [Cedefop's thematic and flash thematic country reviews on apprenticeships](#), i.e. French-speaking Belgium, Croatia, Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Malta, Lithuania, Slovenia and Sweden;
- and Belgium Flemish Community and Romania, which are currently participating in the bench-learning process promoted by the European Commission, together with French-speaking Belgium, Malta and Greece.

This reflects Cedefop's intention to open this peer learning opportunity to a wider range of countries who are undergoing an exercise to reflect on and improve their apprenticeship systems or schemes.

Cedefop 2020 PLF on apprenticeships was dedicated to two topics: governance and in-company training design and delivery. After presenting their short papers on the topics, experts from the participating countries (most of them members of [Cedefop Community of apprenticeship experts](#)) engaged in vivid discussions with the event participants to address the following questions:

- How can apprenticeship governance (arrangements) facilitate an effective link and cooperation between labour market and VET actors to meet apprenticeship demand?
- How is apprenticeship in-company training designed and delivered at employer level to ensure comparable learning outcomes leading to the same qualification and parity of opportunities among learners and employers?

Among the main messages that can be drawn from the PLF discussions are:

- All countries are working or considering working on building a brand for apprenticeships as a pre-condition to increase attractiveness among businesses and young people. It takes time to achieve results and less pressure to build an apprenticeship system, demonstrate its value and attract participants.
- Social partners are particularly involved in preparing occupational/qualification standards, whereas curricula tend to be prepared by educational authorities or VET providers.
- At the implementation level, apprenticeship is managed by VET providers and training companies. Concerns were expressed over the capacity of the VET providers to manage apprenticeship placements.
- The management of apprenticeship positions supply and demand poses a problem in almost all PLF participating countries. Issues such as fragmentation and transparency have been raised. Efforts are being made to centralise the information on the offer and manage the offer and demand of apprenticeship in a more transparent way.

- Countries have made efforts to bring all stakeholders together and work on the governance structures. However, having more stakeholders on board increases the level of complexity and amount of time required at various phases of apprenticeship design, e.g. the selection of specialties to be offered on an annual basis, or the curricula update. Processes should be made simpler (rotating members or a smaller number of stakeholders?) and more transparent, also to face the labour market changing needs and be able to adapt to them. There are still concerns in relation to how to keep pace with the needs on the labour market.
- Stakeholders expressed the necessity to strike a balance between rigid and prescriptive approaches and flexible models in designing occupational/qualification standards and apprenticeship curricula. Compromises should be found when it comes to deciding on the level of detail standards and curricula should encompass.
- Most PLF participating countries do not have a “dedicated” curriculum for the in-company training part of the apprenticeship training. This is established on an individual basis as part of the individual training plan between the VET provider and the training company on the basis of the framework curriculum. Besides issues of comparability, this raises concerns over the applicability of the framework curriculum in a work context. In-company trainers and school teachers need to work together to “adapt” part of the curriculum to the work contexts.
- The sectoral dimension came repeatedly across as an important dimension of apprenticeship (e.g. not all sectors seem to be equally interested in apprenticeship training).

The closing panel debated the lessons learned from the ongoing coronavirus crisis and the future of apprenticeships. Social dialogue’s importance was stressed by all speakers as a key condition to improve the quality of apprenticeship and cooperation in the governance structures.

European social partners were represented by ETUC’s Agnes Roman and Business Europe’s Robert Plummer, the European Commission by Tamas Varnai and Cedefop by Deputy Director Mara Brugia.

Ms Brugia said that apprenticeships embedded in school-based VET systems can benefit from the governance already in place. But there is a risk that such apprenticeships lack a distinct identity. This might make it difficult to communicate the difference or their relevant benefits to employers, young people and the wider economy.

She added that, if social partners and other labour market stakeholders are only marginally involved, apprentices’ training is unlikely to go beyond the individual company’s needs; and this will not help address the skills mismatch problem. If apprenticeship is meant to become a social institution to train and empower the future workforce through high-quality training, then it must grow, perhaps not in size but in depth.

Referring to the coronavirus crisis, Ms Brugia said that post-Covid we must continue working on better quality apprenticeship provision and embed apprenticeships in multi-level governance structures. Social partners can guarantee conditions that allow apprentices to grow as skilled and empowered citizens and workers.

Mr Varnai said that the *European alliance for apprenticeships* wants to boost apprenticeships nationally by incentivising SMEs to offer places, mobilising local/regional institutions and strengthening the social dialogue.

The social dialogue's importance was also stressed by trade unions representative Ms Roman who found the forum 'very timely to discuss how to improve quality of apprenticeship and cooperation.' She was happy to hear from national representatives that many developments involve social partners.

On behalf of the employers, Mr Plummer pointed out: 'We are happy that social partners are involved in definition of curricula etc., but we need to look at increasing the amount of time apprentices spend in the company.' He argued that apprentices need to acquire the skills companies are looking for and use them within specific company context.