



# Apprenticeship review **GREECE**

## Modernising and expanding apprenticeships in Greece



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The report *Apprenticeship review: Greece* is part of Cedefop's second series of publications on thematic country reviews (TCRs) on apprenticeships (1): it presents the findings of the TCR conducted in Greece. Two more reports belong to this series and cover the reviews carried out in Italy and Slovenia. The three TCRs were conducted from 2015 to 2017.

Apprenticeship has existed in Greece as a distinct vocational education and training (VET) option for learners at upper secondary level since the 1950s, in the form of the EPAS (vocational (upper secondary) training schools) apprenticeship scheme, largely offered through OAED (Manpower Employment Organisation), the national public employment service. Since 2013, echoing renewed attention in EU policies on the topic, apprenticeship has been a priority in the VET policy developments in Greece. Activity to reform VET and apprenticeship in the country was particularly intensive between 2013 and 2016; it included the launch of a series of secondary laws, decisions and circulars particularly affecting the structure and governance of the apprenticeship system as well as the operational aspects of the

(1) The first series includes the TCR on apprenticeships reports for Lithuania and Malta.

system. The 2016 national strategic framework for upgrading VET including apprenticeships (hereafter referred to as 2016 VET strategy) includes the gradual introduction of new apprenticeship schemes next to the existing one offered by O.AED.

As a result of these developments, the apprenticeship system in Greece includes:

- (a) the EPAS scheme offered at upper secondary level, leading to qualifications at level 4 of the national and European qualification frameworks (NQF and EQF) after two years of alternating learning at school and the workplace;
- (b) the EPAL (vocational education schools) scheme offered at post-secondary level, leading to qualifications at NQF/EQF level 5 after one year of alternating learning at school and the workplace;
- (c) the apprenticeship scheme of the vocational training institutes (IEK) that will be offered at post-secondary level, leading to qualifications at NQF/EQF level 5 after four semesters of learning at VET institutes and one semester at the workplace (for those IEK opting for apprenticeships instead of other forms of practical training that were the common practice so far).

All three schemes will coexist for a five-year period before the overall system is assessed (2020-21) and further decisions are made on its future structure. Alongside these, school-based VET programmes are offered at upper secondary level (EPAL lyceum, qualifications at NQF/EQF level 4).

The policy developments come at a time when the Greek economy has experienced significant changes during the economic crisis. Conditions in the Greek labour market have continuously worsened since 2008, as the deeper-than-anticipated recession negatively affected employment rates across all age groups, regions and almost all sectors. There were around one million job losses from 2008 to early 2014 and high unemployment rates far exceeding 25%. Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Greece were hit hard by the crisis and have still not recovered. These developments pose a great challenge to the envisaged apprenticeship system, both for enrolment goals in all schemes (broadly set, but pointing towards doubling figures

of 2015-16), and in terms of future labour market transitions of apprentices to regular employment.

In July 2015, the Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs (hereafter Ministry of Education), the Ministry of Labour, Social Insurance and Social Solidarity (hereafter Ministry of Labour) and Cedefop launched the *Thematic country review (TCR) on apprenticeships in Greece*. The main objective of the TCR was to take stock of accumulated experience and the 2013-16 policy developments, and to identify what needs to be considered in further developing and operationalising the new apprenticeship system in terms of solutions and policy recommendations.

### Box 1. Focus of the review

The review examined:

- the regulatory framework, as well as practical organisation, of the EPAS scheme, in place before the 2013-16 policy developments, to draw lessons for the new apprenticeship system (which includes two additional schemes);
- the provisions laid down by the 2013-16 policy and regulatory documents which set up a new apprenticeship system with implications for apprenticeships in terms of place in the education and training system, governance and overall offer and demand.

Analysing the invaluable experience of the EPAS scheme was instrumental in understanding the policy and regulatory set up of the new system, and identifying strengths and challenges of the new regulatory framework relevant to apprenticeship in general.

Source: Cedefop.

## MAIN CHALLENGES

The extensive policy developments that took place in 2013-16 introduced many provisions that set about raising quality while extending apprenticeship provision through new schemes. Although they provide a good starting point for national stakeholders to put the system into practice, still some key challenges remain.

### Governance

As a result of the 2013-16 policy developments, new bodies with competence on apprenticeship were introduced, alongside existing institutions and labour market actors. Their mandates, roles, responsibilities, and modus operandi are not clearly defined, while the two national technical bodies with competence on apprenticeship seem to have overlapping roles. The roles and responsibilities of the relevant national institutions and labour market actors need also to be revised and/or confirmed, and the links between these bodies, institutions and actors defined horizontally (on the same level: national, regional, local) and across level (how the national level governance structures link to the regional and local level ones).

The role of social partners and chambers is still not thoroughly defined: it is also too weak given that apprenticeship requires shared responsibility between education and labour market and direct engagement of companies. The governance framework of the new apprenticeship system is not complete; social partners and chambers are not part of the national and the technical committees for VET/apprenticeships, two of the new national-level bodies introduced by the recent reforms.

The members of the steering group seem to agree that governance issues are among the most pressing challenges for the reformed apprenticeship system. A key challenge for the country is to establish a governance framework that systematises dialogue, shares responsibilities, promotes mutual trust, balances divergent interests and allows for longer-term planning. Stakeholders need to think and act in terms of a single apprenticeship system and a single governance structure.

### Training content and responsiveness to the labour market

The review showed that the apprenticeship offer is not fully aligned with labour market needs.

First, the occupational profiles on which the apprenticeship curricula are developed are considered largely out of date; the procedures for their update (or introduction of new ones) are seen as rather heavy and inflexible. In addition, the apprenticeship curricula define only the school-based component of learning; the

workplace component is missing.

Second, the selection of the occupational profile to be offered as apprenticeship specialities is not yet systematically aligned with labour market needs. It is not based on any research of needs, nor on evaluation of the system outcomes. Despite recent developments, such as the introduction of an overarching mechanism to anticipate skills needs (2016), provisions for a complete, functioning feedback loop that would inform policy-making on apprenticeships are limited or missing.

A further challenge posed by the introduction of two more schemes, is how the provision of apprenticeship specialities across the three schemes will be organised to avoid overlaps and/or competition (for learners, companies) among the three providers. Each scheme corresponds to one specific provider (EPAS, EPAL, IEK) and the different State actors in charge of the three schemes promote them in an uncoordinated manner. Companies and learners should be able to understand them as different options within a single system.

### Participation and support of companies

Lack of information among companies about apprenticeships is a widely acknowledged challenge for the system. Non-participating companies are poorly or not at all informed about apprenticeships. Lack of information on procedures, terms, conditions and whom to address ranks high among the reasons companies cannot or do not wish to engage. At local level, chambers and professional associations are not actively promoting apprenticeship among their members, nor have they received a clear mandate for doing so.

Incentives to date have been rather single-sided, focusing on subsidies for enterprise contribution to apprentice wages. In the absence of cost-benefit analyses and a fuller set of non-financial incentives at their disposal, companies value the financial incentives highly, especially in the context of the economic crisis. However, this approach is not sustainable, especially given the expected reduction in EU-funded subsidies after the end of the 2014-20 programming period.

### Other challenges (scheme-specific)

In addition to general challenges for the future system, some are related to specific schemes.

A prominent weakness of the EPAS scheme is the limited progression opportunities for EPAS graduates, who are not entitled to move into higher education. Several stakeholders have raised concerns over the one school year duration of the EPAL scheme. Concerns over apprenticeship provision by IEK include whether this will be a similar scheme or programme to EPAS and EPAL. While the latter two are designed to be delivered wholly in systematic alternance between school and company, IEK seems to take the form of a semester of alternance between school and the company (out of the five semesters of a programme) where the learner signs a contract with the company for this period. There is no systematic alternance of the IEK apprenticeship scheme during its whole duration. Although the report refers to IEK as an apprenticeship scheme and puts it on the par with EPAS and EPAL (as defined by the key policy documents), its current main features still seem to point to the fact that it will not be a scheme but a way to organise the work placement for the semester to be delivered in a company (currently organised only as traineeships).

## MAIN AREAS OF INTERVENTION

The review suggests that priority needs to be given to governance structures, and address all challenges through a thorough analysis of the roles related to apprenticeship development and provision and a clear distribution of responsibilities among actors (bodies, institutions, labour market actors) at different levels.

A national committee to support decision-making for VET and apprenticeships is foreseen by the VET strategy, but needs to open up to social partners and chambers. Also, its specific mandate on apprenticeships needs to be detailed and a decision-making role can be established in the medium term, at least in a defined range of topics related to apprenticeships.

There should be one technical body <sup>(2)</sup> with extended composition supported by adequate human resources to increase its operational capacity. Social partners and chambers need also to consolidate their internal channels of cooperation that will allow them to participate better prepared and efficiently in a common governance model. National institutions with curricula

and occupational profiles competence need to increase their capacity regarding apprenticeships and to be included in the committees.

On the basis of a clear, participatory governance structure <sup>(3)</sup>, key functions regarding apprenticeship design and provision can be performed collectively at national level. The national committee can be the platform both for addressing short-term issues regarding the key features of the apprenticeship schemes and for their long-term positioning in the education and training system. The selection of specialities offered across the country through the three apprenticeship schemes can be decided by the national committee, based on labour market intelligence coming from a comprehensive system to be built around the anticipation mechanism recently introduced by the Ministry of Labour and the National Institute of Labour and Human Resources (EIEAD) (2016); systematic evaluation of apprenticeship outcomes, including labour market transitions of apprenticeship graduates, should also be used. A wider set of incentives, with a renewed focus on non-financial ones, can be agreed at this level.

The (single) technical body can also support the development of a comprehensive feedback loop that would allow the national committee to make recommendations on the strategic decisions described. It can promote cost-benefit analyses or coordinate work on campaigns to promote apprenticeships, on quality assurance provisions or the coherence of guidance services for learners.

The proposed governance framework may enhance mutual trust and set clear roles for the social partners and chambers in many functions, while national authorities may retain a coordinating role. This may include a renewed or extended mandate for social partners and chambers in updating occupational profiles relevant to apprenticeship specialities, contributing to the development of the workplace components of curricula and developing standards for participating companies and in-company trainers.

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<sup>(2)</sup> Two technical bodies are currently foreseen: one introduced in the VET strategy and one in the quality framework for apprenticeships (QFA).

<sup>(3)</sup> The European Commission identifies governance elements at system level as a key issue for a future QFA in the context of the ongoing cooperation with the advisory committee on vocational training to this end.

Finally, in this context of consolidated cooperation and trust, some functions at national level can remain within the remit of national authorities. The Institute of Educational Policy (IEP) and the General Secretariat for Lifelong Learning (GSLLL) can retain their role in curricula development (fed by occupational standards and workplace components developed with social partners and chambers), provided they work closer with each other to avoid overlaps and benefit from synergies. The Ministry of Education can coordinate, and in some cases organise, training activities for teachers in all schemes based on peer learning.

Similarly, governance local level structures need further description and operationalisation, in a direction that brings State authorities, schools and the business world closer to regular and systematic collaboration, above and beyond project-based approaches. Apprenticeship provision at local level may be boosted in several ways by cooperation among key actors: adjusting school-based curricula to local labour market needs; addressing learners and companies in a coordinated way; and sustaining companies and supporting quality learning at the workplace.

The areas of intervention are aimed at tackling the structural challenges identified and building a long-lasting, coherent system. This may take time. As the

system is expected to be operational and evaluated in 2020-21 based on broad quantitative targets <sup>(4)</sup>, little time is available for its thorough development, which risks hampering the aims of the reform (building a coherent and quality apprenticeship system where all parties are involved, share the same goals and procedures).

The full *Apprenticeship review: Greece* report is addressed first to national stakeholders, represented in the steering group, and by those interviewed, and to broader audience. Distribution of possible interventions in different layers from short term to medium term before system evaluation, may help national stakeholders to allocate their resources efficiently and have more control over the reforms. Read in conjunction with the reports on Italy, Lithuania, Malta and Slovenia, the report will provide valuable insights to those interested in learning in more depth about the experience of other countries in setting up or expanding apprenticeships.

<sup>(4)</sup> Quantified targets for the overall system are only broadly set and frequently revised since the 2015 *Memorandum of understanding (MoU)* of the Greek State and its international lenders. Specific targets are set in the context of specific European Social Fund (ESF) interventions.