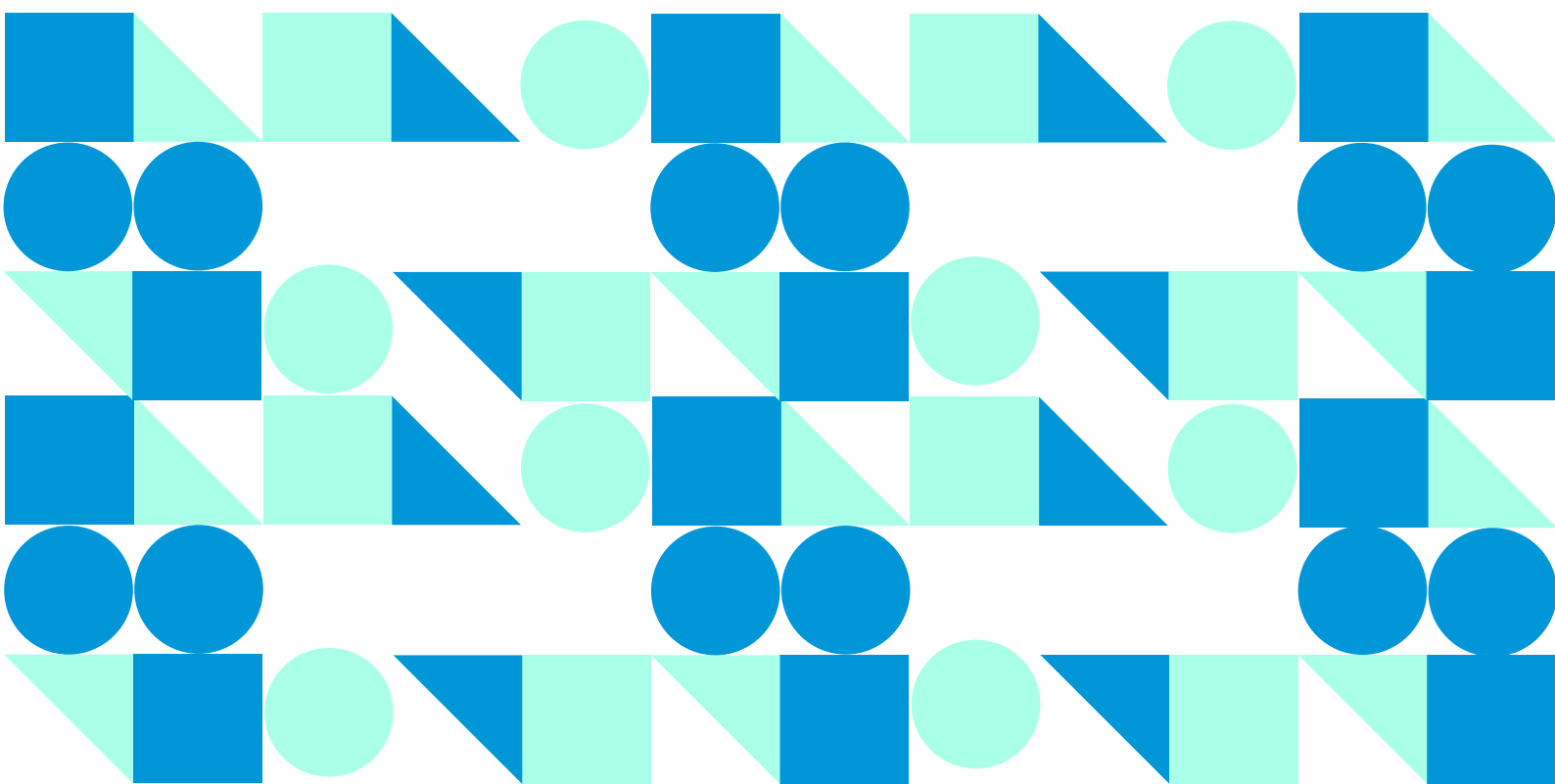




Research paper

Quality of apprenticeships in Europe

Cedefop comparative analysis of apprenticeship
schemes based on the European framework for
quality and effective apprenticeships





Quality of apprenticeships in Europe

Cedefop comparative analysis of apprenticeship schemes based on the European framework for quality and effective apprenticeships

Please cite this publication as:

Cedefop. (2026). *Quality of apprenticeships in Europe: Cedefop comparative analysis of apprenticeship schemes based on the European framework for quality and effective apprenticeships*. Cedefop research paper. Publications Office of the European Union. <http://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2801/8976480>

A great deal of additional information on the European Union is available on the internet. It can be accessed through the [Europa website](#).

Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2026



© Cedefop, 2026

Unless otherwise noted, the reuse of this document is authorised under the [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International \(CC BY 4.0\)](#) licence. This means that reuse is allowed, provided appropriate credit is given and any changes made are indicated. For any use or reproduction of photos or other material that is not owned by Cedefop, permission must be sought directly from the copyright holders.

PDF

ISBN: 978-92-896-4010-7

ISSN 1831-5860

doi: 10.2801/8976480

TI-01-26-059-EN-N

The **European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training** (Cedefop) is the European Union's reference centre for vocational education and training, skills and qualifications. We provide information, research, analyses and evidence on vocational education and training, skills and qualifications for policymaking in the EU Member States. Cedefop was originally established in 1975 by Council Regulation (EEC) No 337/75. This decision was repealed in 2019 by Regulation (EU) 2019/128 establishing Cedefop as a European Union Agency with a renewed mandate.

Europe 123, Thessaloniki (Pylaia), Greece
Postal: Cedefop service post, 570 01 Thermi, Greece
Tel. +30 2310490111, Fax +30 2310490020
Email: info@cedefop.europa.eu
www.cedefop.europa.eu

Jürgen Siebel, *Executive Director*
Tony Donohoe, *Chair of the Management Board*

Table of contents

Foreword.....	1
Acknowledgements	3
Chapter 1. Introduction	4
1.1 Methodology.....	5
1.2. Main observations per EFQEA criterion.....	9
1.3. Cross-cutting messages and points for further reflection	20
1.3.1. Learning and working conditions (criteria 1–7).....	20
1.3.2. Framework conditions (criteria 8–14).....	21
1.3.3. Overarching reflections.....	23
Chapter 2. Learning and working conditions	27
2.1. Criterion 1: written agreement	28
2.1.1. Conclusion of a written agreement	29
2.1.2. Type of agreement and apprentice status.....	30
2.1.3. Agreement coverage: learning and working conditions.....	32
2.2. Criterion 2: learning outcomes.....	33
2.2.1. Delivery of a balanced, comprehensive set of learning outcomes...	34
2.2.2. Basis of apprenticeship programmes.....	36
2.2.3. Training plans for the workplace component and their basis.....	37
2.2.4. Contribution of employer and trade union representatives to informing learning outcomes at the local level.....	39
2.3. Criterion 3: pedagogical support.....	40
2.3.1. Designation of in-company trainers	41
2.3.2. Requirements for in-company trainers (profile).....	41
2.3.3. Teachers' and trainers' CPD.....	43
2.3.4. Mechanisms for teacher–trainer collaboration	45
2.4. Criterion 4: workplace component	46
2.4.1. Requirement for alternation and alternation modes	47

2.4.2. At least half of the apprenticeship duration carried out at the workplace.....	48
2.4.3. Duration of apprenticeships (basis of estimating the workplace share).....	49
2.5. Criterion 5: pay and/or compensation	51
2.5.1. Apprentices paid or otherwise compensated	51
2.5.2. Compensation in line with national or sectoral requirements or collective agreements.....	53
2.5.3. Variation of compensation by year, qualification level or sector	53
2.5.4. Other financial support for learners.....	54
2.6. Criterion 6: social protection	56
2.6.1. Extent of social protection	56
2.7. Criterion 7: work, health and safety conditions.....	57
2.7.1. Workplace compliance with health and safety rules and regulations.....	57
Chapter 3. Framework conditions	61
3.1. Criterion 8: regulatory framework.....	62
3.1.1. Clear and consistent regulatory framework.....	63
3.1.2. Structured dialogue among all relevant stakeholders and the roles of labour-market actors in decision-making or coordination.....	65
3.1.3. Accreditation procedures for companies and workplaces	68
3.1.4. Sanctions for companies	69
3.2. Criterion 9: involvement of social partners	70
3.2.1. Role of social partners at the design level (qualifications and curricula)	70
3.2.2. Role of social partners at the implementation level.....	71
3.2.3. Contribution at the sectoral level	71
3.3. Criterion 10: support for companies	72
3.3.1. Financial support.....	73
3.3.2. Non-financial support.....	75
3.3.3. Cost-sharing arrangements regarding apprentice remuneration, including the use of training funds	77
3.4. Criterion 11: flexible pathways and mobility	78

3.4.1. Entry requirements for apprenticeship programmes	79
3.4.2. Improving access through RPL or preparatory courses	81
3.4.3. Apprenticeship qualifications included in the NQFs	84
3.4.4. Progression opportunities.....	87
3.4.5. Accumulation of units of learning outcomes.....	89
3.4.6. International mobility of apprentices	90
3.5. Criterion 12: career guidance and awareness raising	92
3.5.1. Awareness raising and guidance before joining apprenticeships	93
3.5.2. Access to guidance during apprenticeships.....	94
3.5.3. Access to learner support during apprenticeships	96
3.6. Criterion 13: transparency	98
3.6.1. Information on apprenticeships being publicly available	98
3.6.2. Apprenticeship placements being publicly available	99
3.7. Criterion 14: quality assurance and tracking of apprentices.....	101
3.7.1. Comprehensive quality assurance mechanisms for apprenticeships.....	102
3.7.2. Processes allowing a valid and reliable assessment of learning outcomes	103
3.7.3. Graduate tracking mechanisms	104
3.7.4. Cost–benefit analyses or stakeholder satisfaction surveys	104
Abbreviations.....	106
References.....	107

Tables, figures and boxes

Tables

1. The countries and apprenticeship schemes analysed and the abbreviations used for the schemes in this publication	6
2. Breakdown of EFQEA criteria into quality indicators: learning and working conditions	27
3. Statuses of apprentices	31
4. Examples of learning-related aspects covered in apprenticeship contracts	32
5. Examples of comprehensive sets of learning outcomes	35
6. Basis of apprenticeship programmes	37
7. Schemes complementing VET-wide curricula/standards with workplace standards (for cases without apprenticeship-specific curricula)	38
8. Examples of different roles required by training companies, beyond the role of the trainer	41
9. Share of workplace learning	49
10. Programme duration in years	50
11. Examples of additional remuneration for apprentices (top-up payments)	55
12. Social protection provisions for apprentices	56
13. Examples of specific references to health and safety requirements and the sources of the requirements	58
14. Examples of labour inspection authorities monitoring workplace conditions	60
15. Breakdown of the EFQEA criteria into quality indicators: framework conditions	61
16. Multipartite boards/councils with advisory, coordinating or co-deciding roles or schemes where chambers play a central role	66
17. Accreditation procedures	68
18. RPL applying to apprentices	82
19. Preparatory courses	83
20. Levels of apprenticeship qualifications (referenced in / corresponding to the EQF)	86
21. Partial qualifications and other examples of programme flexibility	89
22. Examples of learner support by specialised staff	97

Figure

1. Extent of non-financial support, by number of support types offered ..	76
---	----

Box

1. Cedefop's community of apprenticeship experts	8
--	---

Foreword

Apprenticeships have repeatedly been proven to be an agile, dynamic and attractive policy response to allow young people and adults to build the skills and qualifications required for evolving labour markets. Since 2018, the Council recommendation for a European framework for quality and effective apprenticeships (EFQEA) has offered EU Member States a reference regarding the conditions required for and the areas that can underpin high-quality apprenticeship programmes. The EFQEA accompanies the ongoing quantitative expansion of apprenticeships to new audiences, new sectors, more apprentices and training companies.

Five years after the previous European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop) comparative analysis on the implementation of the EFQEA, and ahead of the forthcoming European strategy for vocational education and training (VET), this publication sets out the findings and reflections of the comparative analysis of quality in apprenticeships across 34 schemes from the 27 Member States, Iceland and Norway. The analysis covers all 14 EFQEA quality criteria, identifies areas of strength at the cross-country and cross-scheme levels and provides examples of progress made since 2021. Furthermore, this publication offers insights into areas where gaps were identified across the countries and schemes studied.

At the European level, the emerging picture is first that there is a strong foundation for quality in apprenticeships, with clear areas of strength and areas in which further progress can be observed compared with 2021. Additional attention may be required to the depth of coverage of several criteria among the schemes studied. The analysis reveals that most criteria are addressed through different approaches among the schemes studied, and often these variations affect the depth of coverage of the corresponding quality criteria. For example, all schemes are based on a written agreement setting out the rights and obligations of learners and training companies, but the type (contract or not) and content of the agreement vary, affecting the extent of social protection that apprentices enjoy. By identifying the different approaches and patterns, the analysis offers inspiration for alternative courses of action for countries that wish to further improve the quality of their apprenticeship programmes in greater depth.

Furthermore, by discussing the links between different quality criteria, this publication helps connect the dots in policymaking; for example, social partners having a strong co-decision-making or coordination role seems to be associated with their stronger activation at the implementation level and, subsequently, with deeper and broader coverage of numerous quality criteria. While some countries

need to focus on incremental improvements in specific criteria, others – especially those undergoing or planning more comprehensive reforms – may want to consider the interconnection between quality criteria and prioritise a more equitable participation of key actors in governance, decision-making and coordination as the trigger to unlock higher quality levels across a wider set of quality criteria.

This publication therefore provides policymakers, researchers and stakeholders with valuable insights from across the Member States, Iceland and Norway, helping them to understand the breadth and interconnectedness of quality elements in apprenticeship programmes and to support better-informed decisions about further upgrades to the quality of apprenticeships.

Jürgen Siebel
Executive Director

Antonio Ranieri
Head of Department for VET and Skills

Acknowledgements

This publication was produced by the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop), Department for Vocational Education and Training (VET) and Skills, under the supervision of [Antonio Ranieri](#).

The publication is an analysis of quality indicators in apprenticeship schemes in the EU Member States, Iceland and Norway. It is based on evidence from various Cedefop activities and the Cedefop European database on apprenticeship schemes, updated in 2026 by members of the [Cedefop community of apprenticeship experts](#). The authoring team would like to thank Cedefop colleagues and the community members who contributed to this work.

The publication was authored by [Vlasis Korovilos](#) (Cedefop expert), with the support of [Jiří Braňka](#) (Cedefop expert) and [Anđela Gojić](#) (Cedefop trainee with the team for VET for adults and apprenticeships).

CHAPTER 1.

Introduction

The 2018 Council recommendation for a European framework for quality and effective apprenticeships (EFQEA) invited EU Member States to ensure that their apprenticeship schemes are responsive to labour-market needs and provide benefits to employers and apprentices by building on a well-defined set of criteria for learning and working conditions, as well as framework conditions. The framework provided a reference to Member States regarding the areas that can underpin the quality of their apprenticeship programmes, and has been available to support policymaking in this direction. Since then, reforms have taken place in many Member States aiming to, inter alia, increase apprenticeship participation and reach new audiences, target new sectors, expand apprenticeship governance by involving more actors, improve the quality and relevance of apprenticeship content and ensure better labour-market outcomes for apprenticeship graduates with a view to meeting emerging and pressing skill needs.

In 2021, three years after the Council recommendation for an EFQEA, the European Commission produced a staff working document on the EFQEA implementation following a dedicated stock-taking exercise (European Commission, 2021). Key findings showed that, of the 14 criteria, the 7 criteria on learning and working conditions were in place in the majority of Member States, while further progress was needed in implementing the 7 criteria on framework conditions. The report called for additional attention to be paid to, in particular, flexible pathways (criterion 11), career guidance (criterion 12), transparency (criterion 13) and quality assurance and graduate tracking (criterion 14). The report also noted the need for case-by-case improvements, considering the specific modalities in which the individual criteria are implemented and the interplay between criteria (e.g. the type of written agreements used and the impact this has on the social protection and working conditions of apprentices).

In the same year, the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop) published its [own analysis](#) on the same topic (Cedefop, 2021). By analysing the different ways in which and degrees to which EFQEA criteria were addressed in 27 apprenticeship schemes in 19 Member States, the report argued for further crystallising the definition of an ‘apprenticeship’ within the national contexts. Among areas for further attention, the report listed clearer links between apprenticeship programmes and occupations, the type of contractual relationship between the learner and the training company, and the status of the learner in apprenticeship training. The report strongly underlined the importance of the role of employer and employee representatives in apprenticeship governance.

Since then, the quality of apprenticeships has remained a stable feature of the policy agenda. The 2025 [Herning Declaration on attractive and inclusive vocational education and training](#) (VET) for increased competitiveness and quality jobs in 2026–2030 called for Member States to enhance the attractiveness of VET and its parity of esteem with general and academic education by further improving the quality of vocational programmes at all levels, including work-based learning and apprenticeships in line with the EFQEA. The 2025 [union of skills](#) proposes the increase of VET attractiveness, excellence and inclusiveness by means of a European strategy for VET, which will focus on the role of VET in supporting EU competitiveness and innovation, economic, territorial and social cohesion, and generational renewal, by addressing skills shortages and mismatches, enhancing the attractiveness, quality and labour-market relevance of VET and supporting mobility and internationalisation. More recently, the 2026 [Council recommendation on human capital in the European Union](#) refers to boosting the quality and attractiveness of VET and apprenticeships, including by tackling negative perceptions, strengthening the inclusion of disadvantaged groups and addressing gender stereotypes, notably in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) programmes.

Five years after the previous Cedefop comparative analysis, and ahead of the forthcoming VET strategy, this publication sets out the findings and reflections of the comparative analysis of the quality of apprenticeships, with an extended country coverage and across all of the EFQEA criteria. In this exercise, 34 schemes from the 27 Member States, Iceland and Norway (hereafter referred to as the EU-27+), are analysed in relation to the presence of quality elements, as these stem from the EFQEA.

The purpose of this exercise is not to provide a country-specific account of progress towards the implementation of the EFQEA, but to reveal areas of strength and progress, together with areas where gaps were identified across the EU-27+. Cross-country and cross-scheme analysis reveals patterns in how different countries approach quality in their apprenticeship schemes within each criterion, highlights how the quality elements of one criterion may affect others, and offers reflections for future improvements.

1.1. Methodology

The analysis of the quality elements of apprenticeships in the EU-27+ was based on the 14 criteria set out in the EFQEA. The analytical exercise covered all 14 criteria. Most criteria were broken down into quality indicators, which represent distinct analytical dimensions. The development of quality indicators was based on (a) the description of the EFQEA criteria as per the 2018 Council recommendation,

(b) the indicators used in the 2021 Cedefop cross-country analysis on the implementation of the EFQEA, (c) the indicators used in the 2021 European Commission staff working document and (d) the variables covered in [Cedefop's European database on apprenticeship schemes](#). The breakdown of the EFQEA criteria into specific indicators is listed at the beginning of Chapter 2 (i.e. the criteria regarding EFQEA learning and working conditions) and of Chapter 3 (i.e. the criteria regarding EFQEA framework conditions).

The analysis covers the 27 Member States ⁽¹⁾, in which 32 apprenticeship schemes ⁽²⁾ were identified as relevant within the scope of the analysis. It also covers Iceland and Norway, with one corresponding apprenticeship scheme in each (Table 1). All of these are schemes that have a stable/valid legal basis, are system-level or mainstream schemes, lead to formal VET qualifications and are considered as apprenticeships based on the official national definitions. All the schemes analysed are included in [Cedefop's European database on apprenticeship schemes](#).

Traditional apprenticeship schemes that lead only to occupational qualifications without education value, or pilot schemes, are beyond the scope of this exercise.

Table 1. **Countries and apprenticeship schemes analysed and abbreviations used for the schemes in this publication**

Country	Apprenticeship scheme(s)	Abbreviation
Austria	• Dual apprenticeship	AT
Belgium	• Dual learning – Flemish Community	BE-FL
	• Dual training – French Community	BE-FR
Bulgaria	• Work-based learning (dual system of training)	BG
Croatia	• Unified model of education (UME)	HR
Cyprus	• New modern apprenticeship	CY
Czechia	• Dual practical training	CZ
Denmark	• Apprenticeship	DK
Estonia	• Workplace-based learning	EE

⁽¹⁾ In Czechia, following pilot implementation, dual education has been embedded in the [Education Act](#) as an optional form of vocational education. Although the full roll-out of the scheme will start in the 2026/27 school year, the Czech scheme is included in the analysis based on the regulatory framework, which was further expanded in January 2026.

⁽²⁾ The term 'apprenticeship scheme' refers to a systematic arrangement about how apprenticeship provision is designed, delivered, assessed, certified and governed within the overall VET system. Within a scheme, different apprenticeship programmes are offered (for different specialties or occupations), sharing common design and operational elements. More than one scheme may exist in a country.

Country	Apprenticeship scheme(s)	Abbreviation
Finland	Apprenticeship training	FI
France	Apprenticeship contract	FR1
	Professionalisation contract	FR2
Germany	Dual VET	DE
Greece	Post-secondary year – apprenticeship class	EL1
	Apprenticeship vocational schools of the Greek Public Employment Services – DYPA VET Schools	EL2
Hungary	Apprenticeship – dual vocational training based on the vocational employment contract	HU
Iceland	Apprenticeship	IS
Ireland	Apprenticeships in Ireland	IE
Italy	Apprenticeship for vocational qualification and diploma, upper secondary education diploma and high technical specialisation certificate (type 1)	IT1
	Higher education and research apprenticeship (type 3)	IT2
Latvia	Work-based learning	LV
Lithuania	VET in a form of apprenticeship	LT
Luxembourg	Apprenticeship contract	LU
Malta	Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology – MCAST apprenticeships	MT
Netherlands	Dual pathway	NL
Norway	Upper secondary vocational programmes	NO
Poland	Vocational preparation of juvenile workers	PL
Portugal	Apprenticeship programmes	PT
Romania	Apprenticeship at the workplace	RO1
	VET in dual system	RO2
Slovakia	Dual education	SK
Slovenia	Apprenticeship pathway of the upper secondary vocational education	SI
Spain	Intensive VET	ES
Sweden	Apprenticeship pathway of the upper secondary vocational education	SE

Source: Cedefop.

[Cedefop's European database on apprenticeship schemes](#) is the main source of evidence for this analytical exercise. The database offers structured, comparable information across 40 variables for each apprenticeship scheme. Between the end of 2025 and mid 2026, the database was updated by the members of [Cedefop's community of apprenticeship experts](#) (Box 1). For certain countries, in the absence of a corresponding community expert, the update was

based on contributions from other national experts, such as the European Network of Expertise on VET (ReferNet) coordinators for Czechia and Iceland.

Box 1. Cedefop's community of apprenticeship experts

Cedefop's community of apprenticeship experts was set up in 2018 to strengthen and expand knowledge on apprenticeships in Europe. Community experts are professionals with solid expertise in the area of apprenticeships who contribute to the activities of the community on a voluntary basis, bringing their professional expertise and opinion.

Cedefop's long-term collaboration with these volunteer apprenticeship experts from the EU, Iceland, Norway, Switzerland and the United Kingdom results in valuable insights into national developments regarding apprenticeships, identifies existing gaps in information retrieval from the countries in specific areas of concern, and provides a knowledge base for comparative analysis.

Source: Cedefop.

Beyond that, other Cedefop sources were used for this analysis, most notably Cedefop's online tools, such as the:

- (a) [inventory of lifelong guidance systems and practices](#);
- (b) [European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning](#);
- (c) [financing apprenticeships database](#);
- (d) [Mobility Scoreboard Database](#);
- (e) [VET in Europe database](#);
- (f) [timeline of VET policies in Europe](#).

In addition, Cedefop's projects on VET were also used as a source, namely those on:

- (a) [teachers and trainers](#);
- (b) [financing VET](#);
- (c) [learning outcomes](#).

Finally, non-Cedefop sources were used, most notably:

- (a) [Eurydice's Eurypedia](#);
- (b) the *Education and Training Monitor* reports for [2024](#) (European Commission: Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, 2024) and [2025](#) (European Commission: Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, 2025).

For this analysis, references to 'schools' include different types of VET providers, which typically offer the theoretical training component of an apprenticeship (in classrooms or school laboratories). Therefore, the term 'schools' may apply to (adult) training centres or, in some cases, even higher education institutions. Similarly, the term 'companies' may refer to both private and public bodies that offer the workplace component of an apprenticeship programme. The

term 'wage' refers to any type of taxable remuneration of apprentices, irrespective of the corresponding terms used in the national context, while 'allowance' is used for non-taxable apprentice remuneration, regardless of the corresponding national term and the source (i.e. the allowance may be paid by either the training company or the state and other sources). The term 'teacher' is used for staff employed in school-based (VET provider) settings, regardless of their contractual relationship, and the term 'trainer' or 'in-company trainer' refers to workplace training staff of the training company.

The analysis is primarily based on regulatory provisions regarding the design, governance, organisation and implementation of apprenticeship schemes. However, several of the EFQEA criteria related to either the framework or the working and learning conditions may be addressed by long-standing practices that are not strictly enshrined in regulation. Especially at the implementation level, any gaps identified should be interpreted carefully: it might be difficult to conclude if they exist because there are fewer quality elements in place or because, in the absence of clear regulation (and subsequent monitoring processes), such elements are not easily captured and reported. In several cases, especially at the implementation level, practices not clearly based on regulation were considered and included if there was strong evidence of regular provision (i.e. pilots, small-scale initiatives and one-off projects were typically not considered for the analysis). For example, the presence of frequent promotional campaigns for employers to join apprenticeships was taken into consideration, but a one-off, year-long campaign alone does not provide the grounds to consider that the corresponding quality elements are in place.

1.2. Main observations on each EFQEA criterion

Criterion 1: written agreement

Some type of written agreement exists in all countries, setting out the rights and responsibilities of apprentices and training companies (see Section 2.1.1). In most cases, the agreement is signed between the learner and the employer. These are the only signatory parties in 65 % of the schemes that were analysed. The VET provider can be a third signatory party in 26 % of the schemes analysed. Occasionally, the agreement is signed between the VET provider and the training company, not the learner.

The type of written agreement varies (see Section 2.1.2). In most cases, the agreement is covered by the labour code/regulations, either as a specific type of labour contract (in 71 % of the schemes) or as a regular employment contract (in 15 % of the schemes). In one third of the schemes, either the agreement can only take the form of a type of formal agreement not covered by employment regulations

or it can take this form as an alternative to a contractual agreement: in this latter case, the company essentially chooses whether to employ someone with a labour contract or train them under another type of formal agreement. The type of written agreement has a direct impact on the status of apprentices (see Section 2.1.2). In some schemes, apprentices are treated as students, while in others they are treated as regular employees. In 60 % of the schemes, the specific dual status of an apprentice is acknowledged, but not always as the only option. In 18 % of the schemes, apprentices are considered only learners; in another 18 % of the schemes analysed, two or more different statuses may apply to apprentices, depending on the choice of employers or the programme followed (e.g. student, employee or a specific, dual status).

In the majority of the schemes analysed, coverage of the agreements extends to both working and learning conditions (see Section 2.1.3). Working conditions (work schedule, leave, the responsibilities of apprentices, etc.) are usually set and more detailed, while learning conditions (e.g. the name of the in-company trainer or indicative tasks) are not addressed to the same extent in the primary agreement. However, in about one sixth of the schemes, a learning agreement (between the school and the company) may complement the contract (between the company and the learner, mostly focused on working conditions).

Criterion 2: learning outcomes

Learning outcomes are set in a rather comprehensive and balanced way (see Section 2.2.1) in all schemes. They include requirements and specifications about general/cross-cutting skills (in terms of hours, modules, shares in curriculum, etc.). This holds true for schemes following either VET-wide curricula or apprenticeship-specific curricula. There are references to the inclusion of skills for the green transition ('green skills' or 'sustainability competences') in occupation standards, qualification standards or curricula in almost half of the schemes analysed. Similar references to digital skills were identified in 62 % of the schemes. In all analysed schemes analysed, the learning-outcomes approach is followed, but to varying degrees, as some schemes have only recently introduced the approach.

All schemes follow centrally set standards. The basis of the learning offered differs (see Section 2.2.2), especially in relation to the workplace component. In only 41 % of the schemes analysed is the training offered based on apprenticeship-specific standards that explicitly set learning outcomes for the workplace. In half of the schemes, VET-wide standards are followed, which usually do not provide specific references to what needs to be taught or developed at the workplace. In five schemes (12 %), training is based on different types of standards (e.g. occupational profiles and higher education curricula).

In this context, while training plans are universally made for the in-company component across all schemes (see Section 2.2.3), more than half of the schemes

(53 %) do not benefit from some sort of additional reference/standard that sets learning outcomes for the workplace component in particular. As a result, in these cases, training plans are based on learning outcomes that are primarily set for the school-based part, and further adaptation of the VET-wide standards for the workplace has to be undertaken at the VET providers and individual companies by school and company staff.

For most schemes, there is little evidence of structured, systematic participation of employer and trade union representatives in such adaptation of the training content to the local level, as a way to support school and individual company staff (see Section 2.2.4). Their contribution is much more considerable at the national or sectoral level (examined under criterion 9).

Criterion 3: pedagogical support

The requirement for companies to designate an in-company trainer is universally met across all schemes (see Section 2.3.1). Different names may be used in national contexts (trainer, tutor or mentor), and sometimes also signal differences in roles. In one third of the schemes, more than one role is required by regulation (e.g. trainer/mentor and training coordinator).

Provisions regarding the requirements and profiles of in-company trainers vary (see Section 2.3.2). Requirements on professional experience are very common among the schemes analysed, but, beyond that, there are fewer specifications. Slightly more than half of the countries set requirements on prior vocational education/qualifications (52 %) that are relevant to the post for which they train apprentices. Fewer than one third of the schemes analysed (29 %) set clear requirements regarding pedagogical competences. In about one quarter of the schemes, no requirements are set at all or these are expressed in relatively broad terms without further specification (e.g. 'must have the necessary skills and experience').

Continuing professional development (CPD) (see Section 2.3.3) is well addressed for teachers, in terms of both regulatory provisions and actual opportunities/offers. Regarding in-company trainers, in at least two thirds of the schemes analysed (65 %), training **opportunities** are frequently/systematically offered (by chambers of commerce and industry, schools or social partners) as a non-financial incentive to join apprenticeships (or to meet the accreditation requirements). However, **requirements** for the training of trainers are rare and usually linked with becoming a trainer (accredited or not), and they very rarely apply to training after one becomes an in-company trainer.

Apart from the occasional direct teacher–trainer communication, in fewer than half of the schemes, some types of additional provisions exist to support their collaboration (see Section 2.3.4). This most frequently takes the form of an 'apprenticeship coordinator' or 'pedagogically responsible' person in schools or

chambers and, in a few cases, in some other intermediary body. The use of digital tools that, inter alia, support such collaboration has been increasing (e.g. digital logbooks).

Criterion 4: workplace component

In 29 of the 34 schemes analysed (85 %), regulations clearly stipulate alternation between learning venues (see Section 2.4.1), ensuring that a part of the apprenticeship training takes place at the workplace. In practice, there might be cases in which apprentices may not secure a learning place with a training company and can instead undertake part of their programme at school workshops; however, these represent exceptions to the typical regulatory requirement. In the five cases without relevant mandatory provision for alternation, workplace training is usually taken for granted, whereas the school-based component is at issue. The analysis has also identified several cases of a third learning venue (inter-company training centres or alliances of training companies).

Twenty-three of the 34 schemes (68 %) clearly specify that the workplace component should be at least 50 % (see Section 2.4.2). This rises to almost 75 % of schemes if the common practice of schemes in which there is no minimum set by regulation is also taken into consideration. In one quarter of the schemes, either the share is not set or it is below, but relatively close to, 50 %.

The duration of apprenticeship programmes (i.e. the basis on which the share of workplace learning is calculated) varies in 24 of the 34 schemes (71 %) – and in several cases significantly – depending on, for example, the occupation/specialty, the learner group or the type of provider (see Section 2.4.3). When it comes to apprenticeship programmes at the secondary level (usually European qualifications framework (EQF) level 3 or 4) the duration (i.e. the basis for calculating the share of learning venues) is usually above two years and, in most cases, seems to be three years or even more. A shorter duration (e.g. one year) usually applies to post-secondary programmes (EQF level 5) or schemes that are extended to adults, in both cases building on prior (VET) qualifications.

Criterion 5: pay and/or compensation

In all cases, apprentices receive a wage or an allowance, at least for the workplace component of apprenticeships (see Section 2.5.1). For most schemes (71 %), apprentices receive taxable remuneration (a wage) as opposed to non-taxable remuneration (an allowance). In a few schemes, the two options coexist and, in these instances, usually it is the employers who choose to pay either a wage or an allowance. In half of the schemes (17 of 34), remuneration covers both the school-based and workplace components. In the other half (17 of 34), remuneration only covers the workplace time and, in seven of these, it is complemented by a grant for the school-based component. As a result, in 10 of the 34 schemes, apprentices

are remunerated only for the time spent at the workplace and no top-up / additional allowance is reported for the school-based component (i.e. they are not remunerated or supported at all for the school-based part).

In nearly all schemes, the apprenticeship wage or allowance is based on a national regulation or collective agreements (see Section 2.5.2). There are very few cases in which the wage is exclusively based on negotiations between the specific company and the apprentice.

In nearly 80 % of all schemes, variation in apprentice remuneration (see Section 2.5.3) was identified. In 21 schemes, this refers to a progressive increase by apprenticeship year (to recognise the increased contributions of apprentices to productive tasks and as an incentive for learners to complete the programmes) and, in another 21 schemes, it refers to variations by sector, occupation or specialty (as a testament to better alignment of apprenticeship features to sectoral needs). These figures show that, in several cases, both variation types coexist. In seven schemes, it was not possible to identify any basis for variation in apprentice remuneration.

In almost three quarters of the schemes analysed (76 %), additional financial support for apprentices is available, on top of the wage or allowance (see Section 2.5.4). In more than half of the schemes (53 %), this refers to grants related to covering costs for participating in the apprenticeship (e.g. transport costs and meals; less frequently, accommodation costs, the purchase of equipment, etc.). In half of the schemes, such support refers to additional payments, either grants that cover the school-based component or conditional bonuses based on high academic performance, programme completion, socioeconomic background, etc.

Criterion 6: social protection

In approximately two thirds of the schemes analysed (68 %), apprentices enjoy a rather comprehensive set of social protection provisions (see Section 2.6.1): beyond insurance linked to sickness or accidents, the schemes/contracts provide provisions linked to pensions, unemployment, insolvency, leave, etc. In the remaining third of the schemes, social protection is more limited in scope (e.g. relating to accidents or sickness) or its extent varies, depending on the type of agreement that applies (contract or not – the choice of which is usually made by the training company) or on the age of the apprentices.

Criterion 7: work, health and safety conditions

This criterion is universally addressed: requirements on working conditions, health and safety are set in all schemes (see Section 2.7.1). The basis (and the formality) of such requirements varies. In some schemes, these conditions were identified as being part of the agreements / contract templates or were detailed in overarching

agreements between schools and companies. In many cases, it is clearly stipulated in labour law provisions and/or collective agreement provisions that health and safety at the workplace is extended to apprentices and, in other cases, this is set in VET/apprenticeship laws or overarching quality frameworks. When accreditation of companies applies, these requirements are part of the accreditation procedures. As would be expected, labour inspection authorities have a clear mandate to monitor working conditions, including health and safety, more frequently in schemes in which apprentices sign some form of contract and are awarded a specific dual status or that of regular employment.

Criterion 8: regulatory framework

In all the schemes analysed, apprenticeships are underpinned by legislation/regulations (see Section 3.1.1). In all cases, there is an overarching regulatory framework specifically designed for apprenticeships or provisions that apply to all VET but still cover apprenticeships as a distinct option alongside school-based pathways. Definitions of apprenticeships and/or apprentices exist in 82 % of all schemes, taking into account that, in some countries, other terms may be used in the national context (e.g. dual learning or simply work-based learning). Nevertheless, the clarity of the regulatory framework should not be taken for granted, especially in cases where apprenticeships represent an alternative strand parallel to school-based VET (leading to, for example, the same qualifications). In such cases, the distinctive features are not always clear and may simply be centred on the shares of workplace learning compared with, for example, internships of school-based VET strands.

Platforms for structured and systematic dialogue among key stakeholders exist in nearly 80 % of the schemes (see Section 3.1.2). Differences in such dialogue processes or structures can be observed in terms of (a) the level of stakeholder (co-)decision-making powers (discussed under criterion 9) or (b) the range of stakeholders who are regularly part of such dialogue. In 16 of the 34 schemes analysed (47 %), such platforms promote the fair and equitable partnership of various stakeholders through joint tripartite coordinating bodies or multistakeholder councils/boards with significant co-deciding power. In another 11 schemes, the role of social partners and other key stakeholders is mostly **advisory** and, in 7 schemes (about 20 %), there is little evidence of a structured process of stakeholder consultation at the design/decision-making stages. Ministries and representatives of employers and employees are typically present in such processes, sometimes accompanied by regional authorities, national institutions and, more rarely, separate representatives of VET providers (which otherwise are represented by ministries). There are only a very few cases of apprenticeship/learner associations participating in dialogue (although, in several

countries, apprentices are considered employees and therefore represented by their trade unions).

As part of a clear regulatory framework, structured accreditation procedures for a company to provide apprenticeship training (e.g. via chambers) were identified in slightly more than half (53 %) of the schemes analysed (see Section 3.1.3). In the remaining cases, the responsibility usually lies with individual schools, with possible implications for the workload of school staff assigned to such tasks, but possibly also for the quality and transparency of company selection and approval.

Sanctions for companies that fail to provide training apply in more than half (56 %) of the schemes analysed (see Section 3.1.4). In nine of these schemes, sanctions are related to accreditation withdrawal and, in another nine, there are financial penalties (some schemes use both). 44 % of the schemes provide for simple contract termination without further sanctions if a training company fails to delivery (quality) training.

Criterion 9: involvement of social partners

When looking at the role of social partners at the design level, we see that, in nearly all schemes, they are significantly involved (see Section 3.2.1). Involvement might mean designing qualifications (94 % of all schemes), designing curricula (79 % of all schemes) or – most frequently – both functions. Additional contributions at this level may be to occupational profiles or examination standards.

At the implementation level, the role of social partners is less evident beyond promoting apprenticeships (see Section 3.2.2), namely in functions related to accrediting companies, monitoring the quality of in-company training and participating in the final assessment. An analysis of the comprehensiveness of social partners' contribution gives a somewhat polarised image. In only 15 of the 34 schemes (44 %) do social partners (including chambers of commerce and industry or of workers) play a role in three or four of the aforementioned functions at the same time. In contrast, in more than half of the schemes (56 %), social partners (and chambers) have a limited or medium degree of involvement (i.e. in one or two of the possible functions, respectively).

Contributions at the sectoral level are notable (see Section 3.2.3). Sectoral councils or similar structures play a role in apprenticeship design or delivery in approximately two thirds of the schemes analysed (62 %). They are usually involved in skills anticipation and in qualification or curriculum development. Their role is also important in the training of in-company trainers, when countries base wages and contracts on sectoral collective agreements, and when sectoral training funds can be used by companies participating in apprenticeships.

Criterion 10: support for companies

Nearly all schemes (94 %) set out financial support for companies that participate in apprenticeships (see Section 3.3.1). This refers to grants (74 % of schemes), tax deductions (50 % of schemes, including contributions to social protection) or other types of support (62 % of schemes, including compensation of in-company trainers' time, among various other incentives). In about 60 % of the schemes analysed, two or more different types of financial support coexist. In more than half of the schemes that offer financial incentives (17 of 32 schemes; 53 %), incentives are horizontal, that is, they do not vary according to factors such as company size, learner group, sector or region. For example, variation in financial support related to the sector of the training company was identified in only five schemes, and variation related to company size was identified in another five. In 41 % of the schemes that offer financial support, this is linked to quality or output (e.g. appointing trained/accredited trainers or providing a bonus once apprentices get the qualification).

In almost all schemes, at least one type of non-financial support is offered to employers interested in joining or already participating in apprenticeships (see Section 3.3.2). Six categories of non-financial support were examined, and each one of them separately was very or moderately frequent across schemes: 74 % of the schemes use systematic campaigns to attract companies (physical or online); 65 % of the schemes offer training opportunities for in-company trainers by chambers of commerce and industry, schools or sectoral bodies; 65 % of the schemes provide regular support to training companies by chambers, central education structures or other intermediary bodies; 59 % of the schemes provide online platforms and/or centralised registries for companies to post their available apprenticeship placements; 50 % of the schemes offer guidelines for day-to-day collaboration between schools and companies; and 44 % of the schemes offer other types of non-financial support. However, only half of the schemes offer a comprehensive enabling environment (i.e. more than three types of financial support available), whereas, in one quarter of the schemes, only one type or no non-financial support is reported. Several of the non-financial incentives may be offered without clear regulation (i.e. are apparent only at the implementation level) and therefore may not be exhaustively grasped by this exercise.

In about 80 % of all the schemes analysed, cost-sharing arrangements between training companies and the state are rather fair and equitable (see Section 3.3.3). Typically, employers pay wages/allowances and receive some financial support (by the state, from EU funds or from training funds). However, in about 20 % of the schemes, cost sharing is less equitable: usually, employers' share of the total wage/allowance is effectively very small, either due to regulation or due to high subsidisation, including one case in which employers pay no wage or allowance at all (full state contribution). The possibility of mobilising resources

from training funds (which is considered as a rather equitable and sustainable way to finance training) to support training companies was identified in only 11 of the 34 schemes (32 %).

Criterion 11: flexible pathways and mobility

Entry requirements (expressed as learners' age or prior education level) for learners to join apprenticeships are relatively flexible (see Section 3.4.1). Only 12 of the 34 schemes (35 %) set specific requirements for both the minimum age and the maximum age of learners when they enrol in an apprenticeship programme. In most schemes (57 %), only minimum requirements are set, allowing access to learners of higher age groups.

In 19 of the 34 schemes analysed (56 %), it was possible to identify apprenticeship-specific regulations or arrangements for the recognition of prior learning (RPL) or overarching validation arrangements that can clearly apply to apprenticeship pathways/programmes as well (see Section 3.4.2). These are usually linked with the expansion of the programme to adult learners. There are very few cases in which they are linked to shortening programmes for young learners (fast-track options). In the remaining cases, overarching (VET-wide) RPL/validation arrangements may apply, but they were not clearly identified or explicitly reported. There are also cases in which RPL procedures are piloted only in certain programmes/occupations. Preparatory courses, as another means of facilitating access to apprenticeship programmes, were identified in only eight schemes (24 %).

Nearly all apprenticeship schemes lead to qualifications that are listed in the national qualifications frameworks (NQFs) (see Section 3.4.3). In most cases, apprenticeships lead to VET-wide qualifications (22 of 34 schemes, 65 %). Apprenticeship-specific qualifications are less frequently available as the only option (in eight schemes) or as an alternative to VET-wide qualifications (four schemes). Qualification levels increasingly vary: in only 10 schemes are they located in one single NQF/EQF level. Moreover, whereas apprenticeships were typically at EQF level 3 or 4, since the previous 2021 analysis they have become increasingly present at level 5 or higher (in at least 15 of the 34 schemes: 44 %).

Direct progression to higher education and training levels is possible in almost three quarters of the schemes analysed (see Section 3.4.4), that is, no additional studies are required after completion of the apprenticeship programme (although state or university-specific examinations may be required). Among these, in 11 schemes (32 %), such progression is possible for all apprenticeship graduates, whereas, in 13 of the schemes analysed (38 %), progression to higher education levels is possible, but only for those graduating from specific programmes within a specific scheme. In most of these cases, progression refers to both post-secondary and tertiary/higher education programmes. Only eight schemes do not allow direct

progression to higher education levels at EQF level 5 or higher; instead, learners need to take further studies at EQF level 3 or 4 to progress further.

The accumulation of units of learning outcomes is generally possible (see Section 3.4.5) and underpins the processes of shortening an apprenticeship programme, to make programme delivery more flexible to meet learners' needs, fit in with their prior background and align with individual learning trajectories. In some cases, this makes it possible for learners to acquire partial qualifications as part of their apprenticeship programme.

Beyond the application of the European Health Insurance Card and the overall promotion of apprentice international mobility by national Erasmus+ agencies, more specific arrangements or practices for apprentice mobility were identified in almost all schemes analysed (see Section 3.4.6). In 68 % of the schemes (23 of 34), either international mobility is integrated in apprenticeship curricula or specific arrangements were identified for the recognition of learning outcomes developed abroad, with a particular focus on the workplace component. However, comprehensive arrangements that combine four or more of the possible activity types to promote international mobility were identified in only one quarter of the schemes (9 of 34: 26 %).

Criterion 12: career guidance and awareness raising

Beyond online platforms that offer information on sectors, occupations, skill needs and available training / apprenticeship offers (see the next section, on criterion 13), other recurrent, systematic activities to raise awareness on apprenticeships among learners and their families were identified in at least 22 of the 34 schemes analysed (65 %) (see Section 3.5.1). These usually relate to campaigns to promote apprenticeships in general or to address specific learner groups (e.g. female apprentices) or specific sectors. Only a few cases of taster programmes were identified.

In all schemes analysed, services or structures that may offer guidance to apprentices during their programmes have been identified (see Section 3.5.2). In slightly fewer than half of the schemes, such services, arrangements or roles (e.g. an apprenticeship coordinator at schools) are apprenticeship specific (47 %). In 18 of the 34 schemes (53 %), services or structures are common to those available to all secondary education and training / VET learners (in the case of young people) or to public employment services (PESs) offered to all adults (especially in the case of apprenticeship programmes offered to adult learners).

In 24 of the 34 schemes analysed (71 %), specific learner support services or established practices were identified (e.g. psychological support or support to overcome learning difficulties and complete the programme; see Section 3.5.3). In the remaining schemes, it is not clear if learner support is offered in the context of

overall guidance services or not at all in a structured way, through dedicated staff/services.

Criterion 13: transparency

In 21 of the 34 schemes analysed (62 %), relevant platforms/tools were identified for making information publicly available on apprenticeship offers (programmes, VET providers and training companies) and procedures/requirements to join a programme for learners and/or their families (see Section 3.6.1).

In 20 of the 34 schemes (59 %), online platforms and/or centralised registries exist for companies to post their available apprenticeship placements (see Section 3.6.2). In almost all of these, it was clearly identified that learners can access publicly available information by accessing open general job portals or apprenticeship-specific platforms. Two of these platforms reserve access only to state authorities and/or VET providers that support the matching of apprenticeship offers with demand.

Criterion 14: quality assurance and tracking of apprentices

In all schemes analysed, quality assurance approaches (with or without direct references to the overall implementation of the European quality assurance reference framework for vocational education and training (Eqavet)) were identified, covering at least the monitoring of input and output (e.g. enrolments, graduations and dropouts) (see Section 3.7.1). Specific requirements/provisions for data collection on such key indicators are reported in almost all apprenticeship schemes. When it comes to monitoring the quality of the learning provided – including its workplace component – the analysis is not always conclusive on the extent to which these processes capture the quality of learning during the workplace component or if they are only/primarily focused on the school-based part of apprenticeship programmes.

Output evaluation processes related to reliable final assessment and/or examination of apprenticeships were clearly identified in almost all schemes (at least in 32 of 34 (94 %); see Section 3.7.2).

Graduate-tracking mechanisms were identified in 20 of the 34 schemes (59 %) (see Section 3.7.3). These are usually carried out for all education and training / VET graduates, not apprenticeship graduates specifically.

Other forms of evaluation related to cost–benefit analyses or stakeholder satisfaction (employers and learners) are rarely reported (in eight schemes, covering 24 % of the countries), and typically they are not carried out on a regular basis (see Section 3.7.4).

1.3. Cross-cutting messages and points for further reflection

1.3.1. Learning and working conditions (criteria 1–7)

A general review of the criteria related to learning and working conditions as a whole shows that the criteria are usually addressed in the schemes analysed. Quality elements are typically present across all seven criteria. A similar assessment was also made in the 2021 exercises by the Commission (European Commission, 2019) and Cedefop (Cedefop, 2021) (see Chapter 1). Since then, further improvements have been seen in several countries, even though they have only been incremental in many cases, given the strong 2021 baseline (see the examples in Chapter 3).

In all cases, apprentices are remunerated (through a taxable wage or non-taxable allowance; criterion 5), and they very often receive additional financial support and at least a basic level of social protection (criterion 6). In addition, their health and safety conditions at the workplace are always addressed in agreements (criterion 7) and are sometimes checked as part of company accreditation procedures. In all cases, a written agreement exists (criterion 1), an in-company trainer is assigned (criterion 3) and some sort of training plan is usually drawn up (criterion 2), while apprentices usually spend more than 50 % of their programme at the workplace (criterion 4).

What may require additional attention is the extent or depth of coverage of several criteria among the schemes studied, given the variety of ways in which countries address them. Sometimes, the different ways in which a criterion is addressed may be linked to qualitative differences, especially when considering the possible interconnections between criteria.

For example, a written agreement exists in all cases (criterion 1). However, the type of agreement has implications for the status attached to apprentices (student, employee or dual status), which in turn affects the extent of the coverage of their social protection (criterion 6) and, in some cases, their type of pay/remuneration (criterion 5). While apprentices may spend a similar amount of their time at the workplace, be trained in similar content and contribute in similar ways, they may enjoy significantly different levels and types of remuneration and social protection. Such differences may be expected among schemes and countries due to various socioeconomic factors (e.g. wage levels), but they are more striking when they appear within a single scheme/country (e.g. when companies are able to choose what type of agreement to use). Concerns over such disparities stemming from the type of agreement have been raised based on both 2021 analyses and remain valid: for example, apprentices in one third of the schemes analysed receive only a basic level of social protection.

A similar consideration revolves around the quality of workplace training. Apprenticeship programmes in all schemes are based on some standards, but more often than not these are VET wide and not apprenticeship specific. In the absence of clear references for the development of the workplace component, training plans for the workplace rely exclusively on the adaptation of VET-wide standards (often originally developed for school-based learning) between a VET provider and a specific company. This may have implications for the clarity, comprehensiveness and comparability of the learning outcomes (to be) achieved at different workplaces within the same qualification.

Moreover, employer representatives (who consider the overall interests of a sector in terms of developing qualifications among the future workforce) and trade unions are usually absent from such school–company adaptation of broader standards to inform the workplace component (in contrast with their frequent involvement in designing qualifications and standards; criterion 9).

Another area of notable differences, which is potentially linked to the quality of the workplace component, is the requirements regarding in-company trainers. While all schemes set out such a role in regulations (and often name the trainers in the contracts/agreements), only one third of the schemes set a clear profile in terms of work experience, vocational qualifications and pedagogical competences. Most other schemes do not specify one or more of these elements, while one quarter of all schemes use broad statements (e.g. ‘have the necessary experience and personality traits’) or set no requirements at all. This absence does not necessarily mean the people eventually appointed are non-suitable, but it sometimes could signal a reluctance to set high-quality requirements and it also increases the workload of schools, as they need to identify and assess participating companies.

Finally, and without considering the specific level of apprenticeship remuneration (the amount of the wage/allowance per apprentice), in about one sixth of the countries, employers’ contribution to the total wage/allowance is effectively very small. This happens because of either high subsidisation or high shares of state-offered allowances: in one case, state and EU funds subsidise wages to the amount of over 90 %; in one case, the state allowance covers two thirds of the salary; in one case, employers pay no wage or allowance at all by regulation (full state contribution); and, in at least one other case, employers can choose whether to train under a contract (and pay wages) or train under a training agreement so that apprentices receive state allowances.

1.3.2. Framework conditions (criteria 8–14)

An overview of the framework criteria as a whole shows a mixed picture. Several areas of strength can be seen: all schemes are linked to NQFs, and progression to higher education is usually possible when programmes are positioned in the

appropriate International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) or NQF level (criterion 11). Guidance services for learners are usually in place (which are either apprenticeship specific or for all types of VET) (criterion 12). Financial support is almost always available, most often also through more than one type of financial instrument. It is usually complemented by at least one type of non-financial support (e.g. administrative support or an offer of programmes to train in-company trainers) (criterion 10).

In all schemes analysed, there is a regulatory framework that is specifically designed for apprenticeships or that includes apprenticeships in provisions that apply to all types of VET as a distinct option in addition to school-based tracks (criterion 8). A minimum level of monitoring exists, involving keeping track of enrolments, dropouts/completions, etc. (criterion 10). In all schemes, social partners always play some role in the design level (qualifications, curricula or both) (criterion 9) and, in most schemes, platforms for systematic dialogue among key stakeholders exist (criterion 8) and sectors can often contribute through various channels.

Moreover, the combination of various Cedefop sources (see Section 1.1) has enabled the identification of quality elements in most of the areas to which the 2021 Commission analysis has called for more attention: flexible pathways (criterion 11), career guidance (criterion 12), transparency (criterion 13) and quality assurance and graduate tracking (criterion 14). Even if not applicable to all the schemes analysed, progress in these criteria can be seen at the cross-country, cross-scheme level (examples are given in Chapters 2 and 3).

There are areas that require further attention. First and foremost, although regulations covering apprenticeships exist, clarity surrounding apprenticeship schemes is not always guaranteed. The lack of clarity does not necessarily relate to the regulatory framework, but rather has to do with how stakeholders (employers, families and learners) can perceive and understand the distinct features and identity of apprenticeships. This challenge is more prominent when apprenticeships are offered as an option in addition to school-based VET for the same qualifications, at the same level, often offered by the same VET providers. Particularly when country systems and their reforms aim to increase the presence and share of workplace stints on the school-based track, learners, companies and VET providers / school leaders are often asked to choose between two somewhat similar tracks: the one associated with higher company commitments (wages, contract under the labour regulation, etc.) and one with lower commitments (lower allowance, no social security costs, no need to appoint trained/accredited trainers, etc.). In those cases, a clear identity for apprenticeships and their benefits is necessary to encourage stakeholders and users to make the necessary investments.

Moreover, despite reflections raised in both of the 2021 analytical exercises, in about 53 % of the schemes analysed, social partners play advisory rather than shared decision-making roles or are not tasked with coordination of apprenticeship schemes. Either they are limited to only advisory or technical roles or the processes for their involvement are unstructured and sporadic. They may have a role in co-designing or approving qualifications and curricula but may have less say in, for example, deciding which will be the apprenticeship occupations or programmes, introducing regulatory changes and overall steering of the programmes. At the implementation level, the role of social partners is also less prominent and somewhat polarised: in half of the schemes, social partners are present in numerous functions (accreditation, monitoring quality, supporting assessment, etc.), whereas in the other half their roles are significantly more limited. Progress has been noted since 2021, with the introduction or activation of a few new multistakeholder groups or increased input at the sectoral level (e.g. conveying labour-market needs to decision-makers), but the fundamental governance patterns and decision-making competences have rarely changed in the schemes analysed.

Criteria related to flexibility, guidance, transparency or quality assurance these are not always comprehensively addressed within a country or an apprenticeship scheme. In fact, in most of these cases, similar polarisation emerges: between one third and half of the schemes (depending on the criterion) have a wide set of quality elements in place, whereas another third to half of the schemes meet the criteria only partially. For example, almost all countries have introduced quality elements related to the international mobility of apprentices, but about half of them tackle only one of the possible activity areas (e.g. recognition of learning outcomes acquired abroad), while about 25 % have arrangements in place that address three or more relevant areas (e.g. portability of grants and incentives for companies and partnerships for apprentice mobility in particular, on top of the recognition of learning outcomes).

As most of these criteria are often covered by VET-wide structures and services, another consideration is the extent to which apprentices are covered by these overarching arrangements, for example whether graduate-tracking processes differentiate between apprenticeship graduates and other VET graduates.

1.3.3. Overarching reflections

The analysis reveals that, despite many areas of strength and recent progress, several indicators are unevenly met across the schemes analysed, while there are also differences in the depth of coverage. The interconnection between indicators and criteria across the two levels identified in the EFQEA (learning and working conditions and framework conditions) cannot be underestimated when decision-

makers and stakeholders seek to improve the quality of apprenticeship programmes.

Looking across the EFQEA criteria and the indicators developed for this analysis, certain broader areas call for further attention. First, regarding the quality of workplace learning, which relates to indicators across various criteria (e.g. criteria 2, 3, 8 and 14), several schemes can work to further develop quality elements related to one or more aspects, such as structured accreditation of companies and in-company trainers with support by labour-market actors; increased requirements for the qualifications and experience of in-company trainers; systematic monitoring of the quality of workplace training; reference frameworks for the content of the workplace component; support by other actors at the local level, such as trade unions or professional associations, on what needs to be taught by training companies; and concrete sanctions if a company fails to deliver the expected training. The absence of clear references for the less addressed indicators does not necessarily mean that the quality of apprenticeships is low, but, when clear regulatory provisions, strong requirements, well-established processes and arrangements are missing, then the coordination of the actions of several stakeholders becomes more challenging, additional effort is required from their side to address gaps and the final quality outcome depends on informal processes.

The second area requiring further attention is cost sharing and its impact on apprentice remuneration (criteria 5, 6, 9 and 10). Not considering the level of wages (which was outside the scope of this exercise), there is room for improvement in several schemes in areas such as the contribution of employers to apprentice remuneration and to social protection contributions, the increased use of training funds for apprenticeships, the adaptation of financial support to particular employer characteristics (sectoral, regional or size related) and the presence of comprehensive settings of non-financial support instead of sporadic or partial provisions.

A third area for further attention is the intersection of system evaluation with the status of learners; the type of apprenticeship agreements, remuneration and social protection; and a suitable type of support for participating employers (criteria 1, 5, 6, 7, 10 and 14). More can be done in relation to evaluations of costs/benefits or user satisfaction; the absence of such evaluations hampers the identification of the real value of apprenticeships for all those involved. Subsequently, gaining a deeper understanding of the benefits creates conditions for a different mix of financial and non-financial support to attract employers and learners. More importantly, measuring and communicating the real benefits of apprenticeships can open up the discussion on whether apprentices – being productive during the programme or representing an investment after graduation –

should be entitled to a fuller set of remuneration and social protection, when this is not the case.

A cross-criteria review of the patterns emerging from the comparative analysis reveals an association between the extent to which social partners and/or chambers are involved in decision-making and the coordination of apprenticeship schemes, and the degree of their investment and involvement at the implementation level. Limited roles at this level are, in turn, associated with narrower or uneven coverage of indicators across several quality criteria. Conversely, when the participation of social partners and/or chambers in decision-making and coordination is stronger, a similar contribution is more frequently identified at the implementation level and in numerous criteria related to that, for example from accreditation of training companies and in-company trainers to monitoring the quality of workplace learning and participation in the assessment of apprentices. Although further research is needed to consolidate such associations, other indicators seem to follow this pattern, such as those linked to the remuneration of apprentices, equitable cost-sharing arrangements and sanctions for companies that fail to deliver (quality) training.

It should be noted that changes to framework conditions related to the regulatory framework and governance, based on a fair and equitable partnership approach (criterion 8), and to the role of social partners in the design and implementation of apprenticeship schemes (criterion 9) may be harder to introduce and slower to catch on and may have effects on other criteria.

However, even if progress towards higher quality levels is incremental, its significance must not be underestimated, as it has the potential to trigger future improvements across various other criteria in the medium run.

For example, establishing a multistakeholder body with a clear mandate to monitor the quality of apprenticeship provision and prepare policy recommendations may not only lead to tangible policy improvements in the short run, but raise the levels of engagement, trust and ownership among social partners in the apprenticeship system. This in turn is also likely to increase their presence at the implementation level to safeguard quality (e.g. through accreditation procedures, training of in-company trainers and participation in final assessments) and communicate it to more companies and learners. The more social partners are involved in decision-making and coordination, the more vested they are in the quality and the outcomes of the apprenticeship system and potentially the more likely they are to invest resources in all functions, activating a virtuous cycle for quality and effectiveness.

When social partners are only sporadically engaged in decision-making, coordination or implementation, it might be more difficult to establish a clear apprenticeship identity and value and to promote apprenticeships to companies and learners as a quality option. If the benefits and value of apprenticeships are

not evident, companies are less willing to participate or will make their participation dependent on financial incentives. At the same time, education authorities may hesitate to raise quality standards for fear of discouraging employers. This can affect areas such as contractual arrangements, requirements for in-company trainers, accreditation procedures and the monitoring of workplace training quality, creating a vicious cycle of low requirements and low investment. Likewise, learners and their families may refrain from participating due to misconceptions about apprenticeships' value.

Therefore, while incremental improvements across all criteria can be pursued, it is also important for Member States, especially those undergoing or considering reforms, to further examine the interconnection between quality criteria and address the equitable participation of key actors in governance, decision-making and coordination as the linchpin for higher-quality levels in their apprenticeships.

In conclusion, the emerging picture is first that, thanks to continuous activity at the national and European levels in line with the EFQEA, there is a strong foundation for quality in apprenticeships, with areas of clear strengths and progress compared with 2021. Then, the challenge for several of the countries analysed in this report is to achieve both broader coverage (i.e. address all of the EFQEA criteria when they do not already), and deeper coverage of quality elements within each criterion across the full set of indicators devised for this analysis.

CHAPTER 2.

Learning and working conditions

This chapter examines the EFQEA criteria linked to learning and working conditions (criteria 1–7). Most criteria are broken down into indicators (Table 2) in accordance with the methodology described earlier (see Chapter 1). Criteria 6 and 7 are not further broken down, due to their specific and relatively narrower scopes and descriptions in the EFQEA.

Table 2. **Breakdown of EFQEA criteria into quality indicators: learning and working conditions**

EFQEA criteria	Indicators
1. Written contract (Section 2.1)	• Conclusion of a written agreement (2.1.1) • Type of agreement and apprentice status (2.1.2) • Agreement coverage: learning and working conditions (2.1.3)
2. Learning outcomes (2.2)	• Delivery of a balanced, comprehensive set of learning outcomes (2.2.1) • Basis of apprenticeship programmes (2.2.2) • Training plans for the workplace component and their basis (2.2.3) • Contribution of employer and trade union representatives to informing learning outcomes at the local level (2.2.4)
3. Pedagogical support (2.3)	• Designation of in-company trainers (2.3.1) • Requirements for in-company trainers (profile) (2.3.2) • Teachers' and trainers' CPD (2.3.3) • Mechanisms for teacher–trainer collaboration (2.3.4)
4. Workplace component (2.4)	• Requirement for alternation and alternation modes (2.4.1) • At least half of the apprenticeship duration carried out at the workplace (2.4.2) • Duration of apprenticeships (basis for estimating the workplace share) (2.4.3)
5. Pay and/or compensation (2.5)	• Apprentices paid or otherwise compensated (2.5.1) • Compensation in line with national or sectoral requirements or collective agreements (2.5.2) • Variation of compensation by year, qualification level or sector (2.5.3) • Other financial support for learners (2.5.4)
6. Social protection (2.6)	• Extent of social protection (2.6.1)
7. Work, health and safety conditions (2.7)	• Workplace compliance with health and safety rules and regulations (2.7.1)

Source: Cedefop.

As identified already in the 2021 analyses (see Chapter 1), the criteria related to learning and working conditions are usually addressed by Member States at least at a medium level. Since 2021, incremental improvements have been seen in several countries. Many quality elements are typically present across all seven criteria. In all cases, apprentices are remunerated (by means of a taxable wage or non-taxable allowance), and they very often receive additional financial support

and at least a basic level of social protection, while their health and safety conditions at the workplace are always addressed in agreements. In all cases, a written agreement exists, an in-company trainer is assigned and apprentices usually spend more than 50 % of their programme at the workplace.

Further attention is required to the varying depth of coverage of several criteria among the schemes analysed. While certain criteria are met at first glance, there are significant qualitative differences in the way they are addressed, and these might affect more than one of the indicators studied. For example, a written agreement exists in all cases (criterion 1), but its type (contract or not) has implications for the status attached to apprentices (student, employee or dual status), which in turn affects the extent of the coverage of their social protection and, in some cases, their type of pay/remuneration. Apprenticeship programmes in all schemes are based on some standards, but more often than not these are VET wide and not apprenticeship specific. This usually results in the absence of clear references on what needs to be taught or developed at the workplace, which may pose concerns on the clarity, comprehensiveness and comparability of learning outcomes (to be) achieved at different workplaces within the same qualification. While an in-company trainer is assigned in all schemes, only one third of the schemes set a clear profile in terms of work experience, vocational qualifications and pedagogical competences.

The absence of well-developed quality provisions and deeper quality requirements in several indicators does not necessarily mean that the quality of apprenticeships is low. It signals, though, that more elements can be introduced to smooth out any possible (significant) discrepancies in learning and working conditions among different programmes, VET providers and training companies within an apprenticeship scheme.

2.1. Criterion 1: written agreement

EFQEA criterion 1

Written agreement: Before the start of the apprenticeship a written agreement should be concluded to define the rights and obligations of the apprentice, the employer and, where appropriate, the vocational education and training institution, related to learning and working conditions.

Source: EFQEA.

The purpose of the written agreement should be to define the rights and obligations of the apprentice, the employer and, where appropriate, the VET institution, related to learning and working conditions. Prior Cedefop analysis has pointed out that

what seems to make a difference in terms of quality is the nature of the written agreement, rather than its existence. This has implications for the employment protection legislation and social protection rights that benefit the learner. Therefore, criterion 1 is made up of three indicators, examining:

- (a) whether an agreement between the learner and the training company is concluded, and if – and when – the training provider is a signatory part;
- (b) what type the agreement is (contract or not) and how this is linked to the status awarded to learners (a specific ‘apprentice’ status with a dual nature, a student or a regular employee);
- (c) the coverage of the agreement (learning and working conditions).

2.1.1. Conclusion of a written agreement

A written agreement exists (and is required by regulation) in all the schemes analysed. In most cases, such agreements are signed by the learner ⁽³⁾ and the employer. There are very few exceptions: in Czechia, the agreement between the training company and the learner remains optional, but an agreement between the company and the VET institution is mandatory and should clearly define the conditions under which the apprenticeship (‘dual practical training’) should be implemented. In Portugal, the agreement is signed between the learner and the VET provider (not the training company), complemented by an optional agreement between the VET provider and the training company.

The learner and the employer are the only signatory parties in two thirds of the schemes analysed (65 %). Their agreement can be complemented by a **separate** tripartite agreement including the VET provider (e.g. LT, NL and SK) or by a bipartite agreement only between the VET provider and the training company (e.g. ES and FI) covering mostly the learning aspect (see Section 2.1.3), but also other responsibilities of the two parties and collaboration arrangements. For example, in Finland, this bipartite agreement determines if any compensation will be paid by the VET provider to the training company as a financial incentive for its participation.

In about 26 % of the schemes analysed, VET providers either represent a third signatory party (BE-FL, BE-FR, EE, EL2, NO and RO2) or need to approve or endorse the agreement/contract (DK, EL1 and FR1).

In Latvia and Sweden, the training company may opt to sign a contract with the apprentice; otherwise, a tripartite agreement (non-contractual type of agreement) covers the apprenticeship training.

⁽³⁾ For underage learners, the learner’s guardian(s) may be the signatory party.

2.1.2. Type of agreement and apprentice status

Different types of agreements exist, following two different approaches. In the first approach, an apprenticeship is a contract regulated by employment law: either a regular employment contract or, most often, a specific type of employment contract (hereafter referred to as an 'apprenticeship contract'). In the second approach, apprenticeships are covered by a formal agreement of another nature (e.g. a training agreement or partnership contract) that is not set out in and covered by employment regulations.

- (a) In the majority of the schemes covered (24 of the 34 schemes, 71 %), the apprenticeship agreement is a specific type of employment contract (an 'apprenticeship contract'), which is covered by labour regulation and grants specific terms and rights to apprentices. This type of contract is used because they are also learners (e.g. they spend specific hours at the workplace, they require examination leave and the company is obliged to provide training).
- (b) In 15 % of the schemes, apprenticeships can operate under a regular labour contract (i.e. not an 'apprenticeship contract'), with this being the **only** option in two schemes (DK and IE) and an alternative to other agreement options in three schemes (BE-FL, EE and LV).
- (c) In 32 % of the schemes (11 of 34), apprenticeship agreements represent a different type of formal agreement, not covered by the labour regulation, with this being the **only** option in seven schemes (CZ, HR, MT, PT, RO2, SI and SK) or an alternative to one of the prior agreement options in four schemes (EE, ES, LV and SI).

Examples of recent relevant national activities

- In **Hungary**, the 'vocational employment contract' was brought in in 2024, after the previous option had been gradually phased out. This type of contract establishes a formal employment relationship between the learner and the company and grants apprentices a specific status (of a student and employee combined).
- In **Spain**, the 2022 VET Law sets out that all apprenticeships (intensive VET strand) will be covered by a 'labour training contract', that is, an employment contract that also establishes specific provisions regarding learning. The contract currently coexists with other forms of agreements (grant agreements (*becas*)) – the latter will be phased out by 31 December 2028.

Source: Cedefop.

The type of written agreement has a direct impact on the status of apprentices. In some schemes, apprentices are treated as students, in other schemes, they are treated as regular employees; and, in most schemes, they have a specific status: in 20 of the 34 schemes (59 %), the specific dual status of an apprentice (hereafter referred to as 'apprentice status') is acknowledged as the only option. In 18 % of

the schemes, the apprentice can have only student status, and in 6 % of the schemes the apprentice can have only employee status (Table 3).

In another 18 % of the schemes analysed, two or more different statuses may apply to learners: some may have ‘apprentice status’ and some may be treated as students or employees. This may depend on the choice of employers (what type of agreement is signed) or the programme followed: for example, in some cases, within the same scheme, some programmes operate only under an apprenticeship contract, while others operate under other types of agreements. In Belgium (Flemish Community), 95 % of apprentices have a double status, but there are two options for contracts that grant the apprentice the status of either a learner or a regular employee. In Estonia, a tripartite agreement must be signed between the learner (or their legal representative), the VET institution and the training company. It grants apprentices the status of students. Although not required, it is usual that the apprentice and the enterprise agree to sign a work contract on top of the mandatory tripartite agreement. In this case, the apprentice combines the status of a student with that of an employee and receives benefits that apply to both situations. In Poland, apprentices are formally employees first and then they may become students and have a combined status, or – more rarely – take the theoretical training at the employer’s premises and therefore never assume a learner status. In Spain, the status depends on the type of agreement selected. In Latvia and Sweden, if an employer chooses to sign an apprenticeship employment contract, then apprentices get a specific dual status; otherwise, they can remain students for the entirety of the programme.

Table 3. **Statuses of apprentices**

Specific (double) status	Only employee	Only student	Variation (different statuses possible)
 AT  BE-FR  BG  CY  DE  DK  EL1  EL2  FI  FR1  HU  IS  IT1  IT2  LT  LU  MT  NL  NO  RO1 	 FR2  IE 	 CZ  HR  PT  RO2  SI  SK 	 BE-FL  EE  ES  LV  PL  SE 

^(a) In Ireland, for most purposes the apprentice is treated as an employee but with slightly less protection in terms of dismissal and pay.

Source: Cedefop.

Apart from risking the clarity of apprenticeship options, this multitude of agreement and status types has direct implications for apprentices' social protection (criterion 6) and often for the type and source of remuneration (criterion 5).

2.1.3. Agreement coverage: learning and working conditions

In most of the schemes analysed, the coverage of the agreements extends to both working and learning conditions and sets out the rights and responsibilities of both the employer and the apprentice.

When the agreement type is a contract (an apprenticeship-specific or regular employment contract), working conditions are extensively detailed, including the contract start and end / duration, remuneration, the subject of the contract, the schedule of apprentices' presence at the workplace, leave and the responsibilities of apprentices. Some contracts either detail the learning conditions and include a section outlining the individual training plan (Table 4) or cover such aspects in a limited way, with further reference to a separate accompanying agreement or a separate training plan document (see Section 2.2.3). Such learning agreements between the school and the company that complement contracts that are primarily focused on working conditions were identified in about one sixth of the schemes (see Section 2.1.1).

Table 4. **Examples of learning-related aspects covered in apprenticeship contracts**

Scheme	Learning-related provisions
BE-FL	• Details of the in-company supervisor • Schedule of in-company and school-based learning • Individual training plan
DE	• Specification of the occupation for which the learner is trained • Training schedule for the workplace component • Provisions for the training period • Working and training hours • Training measures outside the company (if applicable)
IT1, IT2	• The final qualification to be achieved • The individual training plan, which contains: – training methodologies – learning outcomes – the name of the company tutor – the expected ongoing assessment – the workplace learning versus working time
LU	• Objectives and training modalities in the specific profession or trade • The name and contact details of the apprenticeship tutor • In cases of multiple training sites, the details for each training site
RO1	• The qualification to be acquired • The name and qualifications of the apprenticeship coordinator • The places where workplace learning will be carried out • The time required for theoretical and practical training

Source: Cedefop.

When the agreement type is not a contract, it is usually focused on the learning aspects (i.e. represents a learning or training agreement). In the strict sense, it does not include references to working conditions (since the apprentice is only a student), but instead includes references to requirements or guidelines to be met at the workplace. Complementary (or more detailed) requirements can be set out in accompanying overarching agreements between one training company or more and the training provider (e.g. CZ and SK), which set out the overall partnership framework under which individual training takes place.

Between the different approaches followed, it can be argued that embedding clear and extensive requirements in an (apprenticeship) contract that is covered by labour regulations makes its provisions binding offers a higher level of protection to apprentices and possibly signals a higher level of engagement and commitment by the participating companies than detailing the learning-related conditions only in a complementary document.

2.2. Criterion 2: learning outcomes

EFQEA criterion 2

Learning outcomes: The delivery of 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. This should ensure a balance between job-specific skills, knowledge and key competences for lifelong learning supporting both the personal development and lifelong career opportunities of the apprentices with a view to adapt to changing career patterns.

Source: EFQEA.

Analysis for criterion 2 first examines the presence of a balanced, comprehensive set of learning outcomes that combines technical knowledge and skills with broader ones (varying terms and concepts apply in national contexts, such as soft, personal or general skills, knowledge, attitudes and values). The approaches followed for the relevant indicators matter in relation to the lifelong learning perspective of apprenticeships: a comprehensive set of learning outcomes increases the chances that learning is not too narrow or employer specific, and instead it can allow transition to different employers and jobs within an occupation, but also future career transitions and development.

Moreover, the analysis examines the extent of standardisation of apprenticeship content, both at the overall curriculum/qualification level and in the workplace component in particular. The presence of sufficient provisions in this direction not only improves the labour-market relevance of programmes but also

increases the value attributed to them by the labour market. It also ensures that apprenticeship is underpinned by a structured approach to training and does not merely offer a context for gaining work experience.

Finally, the analysis examines the contribution of employers and trade unions to informing learning outcomes at the local level, namely how they support VET providers and training companies to specify what is set out in the curricula – and possibly support, to a certain extent, the comparability of the workplace component. Employers' and trade unions' contributions to co-shaping qualifications and curricula through centralised, national-level processes are examined under criterion 9.

2.2.1. Delivery of a balanced, comprehensive set of learning outcomes

All the schemes analysed lead to qualifications that are formally recognised by the education system and correspond to an NQF/EQF level (see Section 3.4.3). Because of the link to formal qualifications, the learner is expected to achieve all the learning outcomes set out for the qualification, either at school or at the workplace. This, in principle, ensures a broad set of learning outcomes/competences and a balance between job-specific skills, knowledge and key competences for lifelong learning.

The analysis confirms that regulatory texts typically set out comprehensive sets of learning outcomes, skills or competences that need to be developed (or other similar terms relevant to the national context). In all schemes analysed, there are requirements for the development of general, soft, personal or cross-cutting skills (or corresponding units of learning outcomes included in centrally set curricula). In some schemes, these requirements result in detailed specifications, expressed in terms of hours, modules or shares (e.g. ES, HR, PT, RO1, RO2 and SK). In other schemes, such requirements typically exist but are expressed more broadly (in terms of categories/types of skills, competences or learning outcomes) without setting out an exact distribution among these and subject-specific, technical competences or corresponding learning outcomes.

While such comprehensive sets of learning outcomes or skills/competences may be expected for schemes that share curricula/standards with school-based VET (see Section 2.2.2), apprenticeship-specific standards also follow a similarly broad approach in defining learning outcomes, giving specific references to general skills/competences to be developed either at the workplace or in school settings (Table 5).

Table 5. **Examples of comprehensive sets of learning outcomes**

Scheme	Provisions
VET-wide standards	
FI	The national initial vocational qualifications are composed of compulsory and optional vocational units and common units. The common compulsory units include competences related to basic skills such as communication and interaction, mathematics and science, citizenship and working life, sustainability and digital skills. In general, the scope of the initial vocational qualifications is 180 competence points, of which the scope of the common compulsory units is 35 competence points in total. All initial vocational qualifications also include optional common units. A similar approach is followed for further VET qualifications and special VET qualifications.
RO2	The weighting of skills is set out in the occupational standard and is the same for all qualification levels: • key/educational skills: 5 %, of which digital skills must account for at least 2 %, • Transversal/social/environmental/green skills: 5 %, • basic personal skills/aptitudes: 5 %, • common workplace skills: 5 %, • general technical skills: 5 %, • fundamental professional skills: 20 %, • field-specific skills: 25 %, • specialised skills: 15 %, • specialisation skills: 15 %.
SK	State educational programmes (national curricula) address key competences, vocational competences and personal competences for the field of study (group of similar programmes) at this level. They reflect all key competences set by the European reference framework adjusted to this education level. General subjects represent 22.22 % of study time in three-year VET programmes and 18.56 % in four-year programmes; the school can decide how to use the remaining 11.62 % and 9.47 % of study time, respectively.
Apprenticeship-specific standards	
CY	Outcomes cover occupational knowledge, practical skills, basic literacy/numeracy, personal and interpersonal skills and, increasingly, key competences such as digital literacy and adaptability for the labour market. Each week, two days are allocated to school-based training (modern Greek, mathematics, English, information technology and the relevant VET classes, depending on the apprentices' specialisation) and three days are allocated to in-company training.
HR	National regulations for each UME apprenticeship programme define the learning outcomes. They clearly correspond to recognised categories of learning outcomes used in NQFs, namely knowledge, cognitive skills, psychomotor (technical) skills, social skills and responsibility. On this basis, the qualification profiles set out specific hours for general education, theoretical vocational training and practical training at school and the workplace, varying by occupation and year.

Source: Cedefop.

In at least 16 schemes (47 %), references were identified to the inclusion of skills for the green transition ('green skills' and 'sustainability competences') in occupation standards, qualification standards or curricula. In at least 21 schemes (62 %), similar references to digital skills were identified, including rare references to AI in particular (FI).

In most of the schemes analysed, the learning outcomes approach is followed to a lesser or greater extent, depending on how recently the approach was introduced. In a few schemes, the focus is on competence development (i.e. in broader terms than units of learning outcomes).

Examples of recent relevant national activities

- In **Austria**, between 2020 and 2024, numerous apprenticeship occupations were modernised or created, with a strong focus on green skills and digitalisation. A new package of apprenticeships was added in 2024 in relevant fields, including 'Fibre composite technology', 'District heating technology' and 'Climate gardener'.
- In **Finland**, during 2025–2027, digital and green transition competences are renewed and strengthened in further and specialist vocational qualifications. All specialist vocational qualifications include optional common units such as promoting digitalisation, promoting cybersecurity, experimenting with new technologies and developing the circular economy.
- In **Iceland**, in 2023, a new competence requirement concerning sustainability and environmental issues was added to all job descriptions and competence requirements broadly across all VET sectors.
- In **Norway**, since the 2020 curriculum revisions (*Fagfornyelsen* 2020), increased emphasis has been placed on digital skills, sustainability and green competences, entrepreneurship and the ability to adapt to technological and organisational change. These themes are embedded as cross-cutting elements and are therefore part of the expected learning outcomes for all apprentices.
- In **Poland**, a new set of competences is being introduced in general and vocational education, aligned with the ministerial report *Compass for Tomorrow*. Greater emphasis is being placed on digital skills, literacy, numeracy, active learning, resourcefulness, etc.

Source: Cedefop.

2.2.2. Basis of apprenticeship programmes

In all the schemes analysed, apprenticeship programmes are based on centrally defined standards or curricula. These are frequently set with contributions by social partners, skills councils and other VET stakeholders (see Section 3.2.2). However, significant differences were identified (Table 6).

- (a) In 14 of the 34 schemes (41 %), the training offered is based on apprenticeship-specific standards/curricula, which are designed on the premise that training should be offered in two different venues. Therefore, such standards typically describe what is expected to be taught/developed at the workplace and how each venue should complement the other.
 - (i) Among these, in two cases, apprenticeship-specific standards **coexist** with VET standards. In Belgium (French Community), the choice depends on the occupation and/or the VET provider. In Croatia, the two options are currently (school year 2025/2026) offered, until the full transition to VET-wide standards only.

- (b) In 17 of the 34 schemes (50 %), programmes are based on standards that are not developed specifically for apprenticeships. This can refer to either exclusively school-based VET curricula (which were conceived to apply only in school settings) or common VET-wide standards that **usually** do not differentiate a priori what needs to be taught at the workplace.
- (c) In five schemes (12 %), training is based on different types of standards. In France, apprenticeship programmes are implemented in accordance with predefined certification frameworks. In Italy, the second scheme (IT2, type 3 apprenticeships) is based on higher education standards (not VET standards). In Romania, the first scheme (RO1, apprenticeships at the workplace) can be based on occupational standards, if a formal VET standard is not developed for an occupation. In Spain, apprenticeships at level C can be based on employment programmes, with a certificate granted accrediting a set of skills, which is linked to a VET qualification.

Table 6. **Basis of apprenticeship programmes**

Apprenticeship-specific standards	VET-wide standards (or school-based standards)	Both may exist	Other
			
AT  EL2  BE-FL  IE  CY  IS  DE  LU  DK  MT  EL1  NO 	BG  IT1  RO1  CZ  LT  RO2  EE  LV  SE  ES  NL  SI  FI  PL  SK  HU  PT 	BE-FR   HR ^(a) 	ES ^(b)  FR1  FR2  IT2  RO1 ^(b) 

^(a) In this instance, there is a temporary coexistence of two options; the apprenticeship-specific standards are set to be fully replaced by VET-wide curricula.

^(b) In these instances, some programmes are based on different standards (not apprenticeship-specific or VET-wide ones) exceptionally; therefore, the schemes appear twice in the table.

Source: Cedefop.

2.2.3. Training plans for the workplace component and their basis

In all schemes analysed, an individual training plan for the workplace component is drawn up as a reference for what each apprentice is expected to learn, practice or develop. In most schemes, this is required by regulation and, when this is not a formal requirement (e.g. HR), it is the standard practice.

The universal existence of individual training plans is an instrument that can be used to increase adaptation to learner needs and preferences and can underpin practices related to RPL (e.g. FI; see Section 3.4.2). It also allows parameters to be taken into consideration that are related to the training company (specialisation

and technical capacity) and, in some cases, also overall local labour-market or local society specificities.

A significant distinction can be identified in relation to the basis of the individual training plan: does it follow centrally set (at the national or sectoral level) requirements for the workplace component of apprenticeships or does it rely entirely on the adaptation of VET curricula/standards by schoolteachers and in-company trainers?

When apprenticeship-specific standards exist (see Section 2.2.2), they typically define parameters that can feed into the development of each individual training plan. Therefore, even when further adaptation is made by teachers and trainers, this is based on clear references.

When apprenticeship is based on VET-wide or school-based VET standards – as is true in most cases (see Section 2.2.2) – it is likely that the workplace component is not considered in the design of standards/curricula. Within this category, in only five schemes, the development of an individual training plan at the school/company level benefits from centrally set workplace learning (minimum) requirements based on workplace standards or frameworks, developed at the national or sectoral level by, for example, social partners or competent national authorities (Table 7).

Table 7. **Schemes complementing VET-wide curricula/standards with workplace standards (for cases without apprenticeship-specific curricula)**

Scheme	Additional workplace standard provisions
CZ	For the workplace component, apprenticeship quality standards are issued by the relevant organisation of dual providers (i.e. employers' organisations with nationwide scope). Inter alia, these include: • which of the clearly defined learning outcomes students are to achieve within the dual education system and by when; • what the recommended class hours and thematic lesson plans (even if only indicative) are at the workplace, etc.; • how the lesson plan will be structured in terms of content into blocks based on the curriculum in the relevant framework educational programme for the given field of study; • how the dual education provider should adapt the workplace for students' practical instruction.
FR1, FR2	Certification frameworks include the work situations and activities that are to be carried out at the workplace, which complement the overall skills and knowledge that should be learnt.
SI	Learning outcomes and final examination standards are defined by an educational programme, developed for school-based VET programmes in a specific speciality. Within the educational programme, the learning outcomes of the training in companies are also defined.
SK	Framework education programmes include specific conditions that set out the number of hours needed to be spent in apprenticeships, as well as which activities qualify for apprenticeships and which do not.

Source: Cedefop.

In 18 of the 34 schemes analysed (53 %), workplace learning seems to happen entirely based on the adaptation of VET-wide or school-based VET standards by school and company staff, based on, for example, their expertise, capacity and understanding of curricula, and possibly on company-specific limitations or preferences.

If the workplace training content is solely based on case-by-case adaptation, without clear references to standards or frameworks for the workplace component, ambiguity may surround the comprehensiveness of training and the comparability of learning experiences among apprentices in the same programme.

Therefore, while training plans are typically used, further attention needs to be paid to the extent to which they are based on common standards and the extent to which they guarantee parity of opportunities, to ensure that learning is structured and intentional and linked to the achievement of the qualification.

2.2.4. Contribution of employer and trade union representatives to informing learning outcomes at the local level

As shown by the frequent adaptation of training content at the school/company level (see Section 2.2.3), VET institutions and **individual** training companies usually have a significant say in specifying the centrally set standards/curricula, at least as far as the workplace component is concerned, through the development of individual training plans.

The contributions of **representatives** of employers and trade unions in shaping learning outcomes for apprenticeships are almost always involved at the national or sectoral level in the **design stage** of qualifications or standards (criterion 9), even if such contributions often refer to VET-wide qualifications or standards, which inevitably limits the extent to which their contributions inform and detail what is expected to be taught/achieved at the workplace specifically.

Contributions by representatives of employers and trade unions to local-level choices on learning outcomes / learning content were rarely identified in the schemes.

- (a) In Denmark, trade committees work closely alongside VET providers to specify curricula in relation to local labour-market needs (including which optional subjects may be offered) and communicate such needs to the national level in collaboration with their corresponding national branches.
- (b) In Latvia, advisory boards of VET schools ('conventions') include local- or regional-level employer representatives to better coordinate apprenticeship provision.
- (c) In Romania (RO2), associations or consortia of companies may conclude overarching partnership agreements with a VET provider and the corresponding regional authority, setting the conditions of collaboration and the framework under which apprenticeships can take place.

- (d) In Slovenia, a training company and a VET school together with the authorised chamber prepare an individual training plan for every apprentice, taking into consideration the requirements set out in the corresponding VET programme.

For most schemes, there is little evidence of such structured, systematic participation of employer and trade union representatives in the local-level adaptation of training content, as a way to support school and individual company staff. This is a point for further consideration, as past Cedefop analysis of apprenticeships in selected Member States (the [Thematic Country Reviews](#) series) often highlighted the need of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to get guidance on what they should be training apprentices on during the workplace component of apprenticeships, and the significant burden on VET providers if they have to cover this need solely based on their own resources (the time of VET teachers or school leaders).

2.3. Criterion 3: pedagogical support

EFQEA criterion 3

Pedagogical support: In-company trainers 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 feed-back. Teachers, trainers and mentors, especially in micro-, small and medium-sized companies, should be supported to update their skills, knowledge and competences in order to train apprentices according to the latest teaching and training methods and labour market needs.

Source: EFQEA

The analysis of criterion 3 covers not only the appointment of in-company trainers, but also what the requirements of such profiles are in terms of relevant qualifications and pedagogical competences. It also examines the support offered to both teachers and in-company trainers, not only in terms of updating their skills, knowledge and competences, but also in relation to mechanisms and arrangements that facilitate their regular and smooth collaboration. The term 'teacher' is used for staff employed in school-based (VET provider) settings regardless of their contractual relationship, and the term 'trainer' or 'in-company trainer' refers to workplace training staff of the training company. The indicators developed for this criterion include:

- (a) whether a person is assigned the role of in-company trainer, and if this is combined with more roles (and, possibly, more people) such as those of mentor, coach or supervisor;

- (b) requirements for in-company trainers in terms of professional qualifications and knowledge/competences to support apprentice learning;
- (c) provisions regarding the CPD of VET teachers and in-company trainers;
- (d) arrangements supporting the collaboration between VET teachers and in-company trainers.

2.3.1. Designation of in-company trainers

The requirement for companies to designate an in-company trainer is universally met, across all schemes. Different names may be used in national contexts (trainer, tutor, mentor or training supervisor), sometimes also signalling differences in roles. In at least one third of the schemes, more than one role is set out in regulation (e.g. a trainer and a training coordinator, or different people acting as a trainer and a mentor) (Table 8).

Table 8. **Examples of different roles required by training companies, beyond the role of the trainer**

Scheme	Possible additional roles
AT	• Trainer and training supervisor
BE-FR	• Tutor and training contact persons
DE	• Trainer and other skilled workers
DK	• Trainers and training officer
FI	• Workplace instructor and other people at the workplace
IE	• Mentor and assessor/verifier
IS	• Trained supervisor and at least one trained employee
LT	• Trainer and the person responsible for organising training
NO	• Training supervisor and workplace trainers
RO1	• Trainer and coordinator
SK	• Instructors and head of instructors

Source: Cedefop.

2.3.2. Requirements for in-company trainers (profile)

Requirements on the professional experience of in-company trainers are very common among the schemes analysed (when specified, they typically range between three and five years of experience in a role relevant to the qualification). However, beyond that, specifications vary.

- (a) Clear requirements regarding prior vocational education/qualification (including master craftsman qualifications) are set in only half of the schemes examined (53 %).
 - (i) In some cases, a relevant qualification may not be mandatory. For example, in Belgium (Flemish Community), a person who holds a relevant VET qualification can become a trainer at a younger age (23

instead of 25 years) and have fewer years of experience than what is initially required (five years). In Denmark, training companies are not obliged to assign trained mentors, but optional 10-day or 6-week courses exist for trainers, leading to formal qualifications.

- (ii) In other cases, qualification requirements are not detailed (e.g. NO), are set but not yet implemented (e.g. EL1 and EL2) or refer to people different from the trainer per se (e.g. in IS, a relevant VET qualification is required for at least one company staff member, not necessarily the trainer).
- (b) Clear requirements for in-company trainers to already have pedagogical training (or qualifications that include pedagogical training) competences were identified in less than one third of the schemes analysed (29 %) (e.g. in BE-FR the company tutor has to hold an educational qualification, a tutoring training certificate or a qualification validating their skills as a tutor). However, this is often complemented with requirements for company staff to undertake relevant short training to get accredited as trainers before (or in some cases soon after) they start training apprentices. When the two requirements are examined in combination, 53 % of the schemes set some sort of pre-existing pedagogical competences or purposive relevant training.
- (c) Some type of examination for in-company trainers (e.g. in DE, company trainers must pass an aptitude test) and/or accreditation/registration procedures for them personally (as part of overall company accreditation) have been reported in about one third (35 %) of the schemes analysed.
- (d) In 26 % of the schemes, specific requirements related to in-company trainers are not set at all (e.g. CY, EE, ES, LT, PT and RO2) or references are rather broad ('be sufficiently qualified' in FI, 'must have the necessary skills and experience' in SE and 'must be among the company's qualified employees' in a France-professionalisation contract).

According to the analysis, in a little more than one third of the schemes (38 %), regulations set a ratio of in-company trainers to apprentices. These range between 1:3 and – more frequently – 1:5 or 1:6. The ratio is in most cases mandatory (an exception in, for example, LV is that the ratio is a recommendation).

Examples of recent relevant national activities

- In **Croatia**, alongside the existing master craftsman exam, which enables craftsmen to become in-company mentors, a new exam for in-company mentors was introduced in 2021. The exam is conducted by the Croatian Chamber of Trades and Crafts. It was introduced in accordance with the Act on Crafts, the 2020 regulation on the programme of examination proving basic knowledge of

teaching in apprenticeship training and the 2020 regulation on the implementation of the exam proving basic knowledge of teaching in apprenticeship training.

- In **Poland**, the duration of a dedicated course to provide pedagogical skills to in-company mentors was increased from 24 to 32 hours (as an alternative to having a master/foreman title).

Source: Cedefop.

2.3.3. Teachers' and trainers' CPD

In most cases, staff teaching in the school-based part of apprenticeship programmes is covered by regulations regarding the overall teacher CPD provisions. Therefore, CPD for teachers is well addressed, in terms of both regulatory provisions and actual opportunities/offers. Based on data from Cedefop's project on VET [teachers' and trainers' professional development](#), **requirements** for teachers' CPD were identified in most schemes (approximately 80 %). Beyond the mandatory requirements, practices and **opportunities** for teachers' CPD were identified in all schemes analysed, including recently the ability to develop digital and green skills or AI.

When it comes to in-company trainers, the situation is rather different: clear requirements for CPD are very rarely reported.

- (a) Provisions for mandatory training may exist, but they are usually linked to meeting requirements to **become** a trainer (i.e. some sort of accreditation; see Section 2.3.1) and are usually focused on developing pedagogical competences or getting acquainted with apprenticeship procedures (reporting, collaborating with schools, keeping record of apprentice progress, etc.). For example, in Sweden, the national agency for education has developed a web-based course for apprentice supervisors on the above topics and a supplementary module that delves deeper into how they can better support and engage apprentices and plan their work with them.
- (b) There is almost no reference to CPD requirements **after** someone has become an in-company trainer. In Greece, the law provides that labour-market actors and educational institutions should be responsible not only for initial training and accreditation of in-company trainers, but also for their CPD; however, these provisions have not yet been implemented. It has to be noted, however, that trainers' CPD might fall under overall training entitlements for being a company employee (e.g. collective agreements setting statutory rights to training).

On the other hand, in about two thirds of the schemes analysed (65 %), training **opportunities** for in-company trainers' training are frequently/systematically offered by various apprenticeship stakeholders (e.g. chambers, schools and social partners). These represent a non-financial incentive

to join apprenticeships or are one way to meet the aforementioned accreditation requirements.

Examples of recent relevant national activities

- In **Belgium (French Community)**, FormaForm is a partnership scheme set up by the key vocational training actors Le Forem, Bruxelles Formation and IFAP. FormaForm has deployed a wide range of training courses and other methods to support teachers and trainers in updating their digital skills. Since 2023, the offer has been structured around three main areas: (a) the professionalisation of trainers, (b) the professionalisation of guidance stakeholders and (c) ensuring the quality of assessments and certifications carried out by training and skills validation providers.
- In **Bulgaria**, in 2025, the Bulgarian Industrial Chamber launched an innovative project aimed at training mentors in the dual system on how to apply AI in training apprentices.
- In **Denmark**, in 2024, the government and parliamentary parties have reached an agreement to allocate funding for modern, green-oriented equipment and for upskilling teachers in green competences, enabling learners to acquire relevant skills for emerging sustainable occupations.
- In **France**, as of 2022, apprenticeship training centres need to possess a national quality certification (*Qualiopi*), which links accreditation to criteria on the participation of apprenticeship training centre staff in professional development and continuing training activities.
- In **Germany**, in 2023, the education ministry published new funding guidelines focused on projects strengthening the professional competences of training staff in sustainability (the ‘Sustainable at work – future-oriented training’ funding programme, with European Social Fund co-financing).
- In **Greece** (EL1), in 2024, a multiyear project was completed that provided specialised CPD for teaching staff who used to work in school-based programmes and were subsequently (re)allocated to apprenticeship programmes. The project focused on developing teachers’ knowledge and competences to enable further cooperation with enterprises and apprentices. It included thematic areas such as basic principles of adult education and modern teaching technologies, counselling and vocational guidance, occupational safety and health and entrepreneurship.
- In **Lithuania**, the Recovery and Resilience Facility project ‘Qualification improvement – higher VET quality’ (2023–2026) includes training approximately 200 company trainers on pedagogical and andragogical competences and approximately 800 VET teachers on technical competences.
- In **Sweden**, the Swedish National Agency for Education (Skolverket) initiated in 2022 a comprehensive professional development programme (*professionsprogrammet*) for teachers and school leaders. The programme is designed to strengthen teaching quality, improve student outcomes and promote ongoing professional learning throughout the education system. For VET, the programme recognises the dual nature of vocational teachers’ competences, namely having expertise in the subject matter linked to the specific trades or professions and having pedagogical skills related to effective teaching methodologies.

Source: Cedefop.

2.3.4. Mechanisms for teacher–trainer collaboration

Apart from the direct communication between teachers and trainers, some type of additional structure/process to support their collaboration was identified in fewer than half of the apprenticeship schemes analysed.

In most of the cases identified, this takes place in the form of nomination of and support by reference people from VET providers.

- (a) In Belgium (Flemish Community), dual learning providers appoint a ‘trajectory counsellor’ for each apprentice. This person, among other tasks, helps draft the individual training plan and follows up on the workplace training through communication with in-company trainers and visits to the workplace.
- (b) In Belgium (French Community), in each professional training centre of the Institut wallon de Formation en Alternance et des indépendants et Petites et Moyennes Entreprises (Wallon Institute for Dual Training and for Self-employed Workers and Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (IFAPME)), which is one of the main apprenticeship providers, a reference person acts as a liaison between the company and the school and helps companies with drafting the individual training plan, handling administrative procedures and improving the quality of training.
- (c) In Czechia, the school assigns a member of its staff to be the coordinator, to facilitate cooperation between schoolteachers and the instructor in practical training (and this person is also entrusted with the inspection activities over the course of the practical training).
- (d) In Portugal, a ‘pedagogical responsible’ from the VET centre acts as the facilitator between the apprentice, the training centre and the company, and works with the in-company trainer(s) to define the training plan and support its implementation.
- (e) In Slovenia, the coordinator of practical training in VET schools acts as the key link between the school and companies, coordinates placements and communication, manages administrative tasks related to workplace training and monitors apprentices during their in-company training periods.

Sometimes similar support is offered by apprenticeship coordinating bodies or ministries.

- (a) In Greece, apprenticeship coordinators are appointed at the regional level by the regional education directorate. They act as liaisons between the schools and the employers, and they support teachers, trainers and apprentices during implementation.
- (b) In Ireland, authorised officers from SOLAS (the state agency responsible for Further Education and Training) liaise with employers at the initial approval stage and on an ongoing basis to ensure the quality of apprentice training at the workplace and support the welfare of apprentices during their training.

Digital tools support collaboration between teachers and trainers, not only facilitating the completion of expected training and the coordination between the two learning venues but also increasing transparency and trust among all those involved. In Malta, apprentices fill in a vocational competence logbook that is verified by the employer, and Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST), which is the main apprenticeship provider, has developed a monitoring system for lecturers to monitor what apprentices learn at the workplace. Apprentice logbooks are used in several other schemes, irrespective of the technology used (e.g. DE and LU).

The analysis of non-financial support (see criterion 10) reveals that in approximately two thirds of the schemes (65 %) some sort of regular support is offered to training companies by chambers, intermediary bodies and professional associations as well as VET schools, but it does not always refer to shaping and offering training (it could be about overall administrative support).

Example of recent relevant national activities

In **Iceland**, the national digital VET logbook strengthens coordination between schools, workplaces and learners and allows systematic monitoring and validation of competences acquired during workplace learning. Initially introduced in 2019 and expanded as of 2021, it is a central development for apprenticeships in Iceland that is widely used and well received by all parties involved.

Source: Cedefop.

2.4. Criterion 4: workplace component

EFQEA criterion 4

Workplace component: A substantial part of the apprenticeship, meaning at least half of it, should be carried out in the workplace with, where possible, the opportunity to undertake a part of the workplace experience abroad. Taking into account the diversity of national schemes, the aim is to progress gradually towards that share of the apprenticeship being workplace learning.

Source: EFQEA.

Criterion 4 first examines if there are clear requirements for alternation of learning venues enshrined in regulation or whether all apprenticeship training can take place in one venue (only at the employer's premises as a regulatory provision or only at a school if there is not a sufficient number of training companies). It also examines the (minimum or exact) share of workplace learning as part of the overall programme duration, as per the regulatory framework (and in its absence, if

possible, based on the regular practice). Finally, the analysis of criterion 4 considers what the point of reference is for the minimum 50 % – that is, the overall programme duration upon which the share is calculated – and whether this duration differs by occupation, level, apprenticeship year or learner group (young people or adults). The international mobility of apprentices is examined under criterion 11.

2.4.1. Requirement for alternation and alternation modes

Generally, there is no issue with apprenticeships not including a workplace training part. In 29 of the 34 schemes analysed (85 %), regulations clearly stipulate the alternation between learning venues, ensuring that a part of the apprenticeship training takes place at the workplace. In practice, there might be cases in which apprentices may not secure a learning place with a training company and can take part of their programme at school workshops, but these represent exceptions to the typical regulatory requirement.

In those cases in which there is no relevant mandatory provision for alternation, the workplace training is usually taken for granted, whereas the school-based component is the part in question. In four schemes where a requirement for alternation is not set, it is possible that all training can take place at the workplace (e.g. HU, LT, PL and RO1). In practice, this represents the exception: although not formally required, employers usually ask their apprentices to attend schools for the theoretical part of training. However, if training is offered entirely at the employer's premises, a clear distinction between practical and theoretical training is set in regulations, with the latter also offered at the company premises, by (accredited) company trainers or visiting staff. In such cases, accreditation procedures, monitoring or quality assurance elements may be required to address possible concerns about the delivery of theoretical training and its content in relation to educational goals and expected learning outcomes.

In one more case, that of Finland, the requirement is not set, as the suitable ways for learners to acquire competences are planned individually, including the choice of the learning environment. It is expected (although not requested), however, that, when an apprenticeship is chosen as a form of learning, it is based on the combination of two learning venues.

In some cases, it is possible that two or more companies join forces to provide comprehensive training to apprentices according to the expected learning outcomes or that part of the training takes place in a third venue (i.e. an inter-company training centre).

- (a) In Austria, if a company cannot provide the full equipment for an apprenticeship, it is obligatory that an alliance of companies does so.
- (b) In Germany, if a company cannot cover the entire necessary training content, it can send its apprentices to courses at inter-company vocational training

- centres. There is also the option to form a training alliance with other companies.
- (c) In Hungary, companies may establish joint sectoral training centres, which are being set up to support the capacity of SMEs and micro-enterprises to offer training.
 - (d) In Norway, if some parts of the expected training of a single apprentice or a group of apprentices cannot be delivered by a single company, the company should join forces, for example, with other neighbouring enterprises.
 - (e) In Poland, sectoral skills centres (introduced in 2023) can also see to some of the training activities, among other duties.
 - (f) In Slovenia, the individual training plan of each apprentice must include additional arrangements when a company cannot provide all of the required learning outcomes on its own, for example through an inter-company training centre or another company.
 - (g) In Spain, intermediate bodies can bring together SMEs to implement apprenticeships, complement learning outcomes and facilitate knowledge sharing and best practices among SMEs.

2.4.2. At least half of the apprenticeship duration carried out at the workplace

In 23 of the 34 schemes (68 %), a share of 50 % or more for the workplace component is clearly stated in laws, qualification profiles, curricula, decisions of sectoral bodies or other regulatory documents (Table 9).

In six schemes (18 %), the regulation **does not set out a minimum** share for the workplace component but, in practice, in half of these schemes it is reported that it usually takes up more than 50 % of the total scheme duration.

If regulatory requirements and usual practical arrangements are examined in combination, in 26 of the 34 schemes (76 %) the workplace share is 50 % or higher.

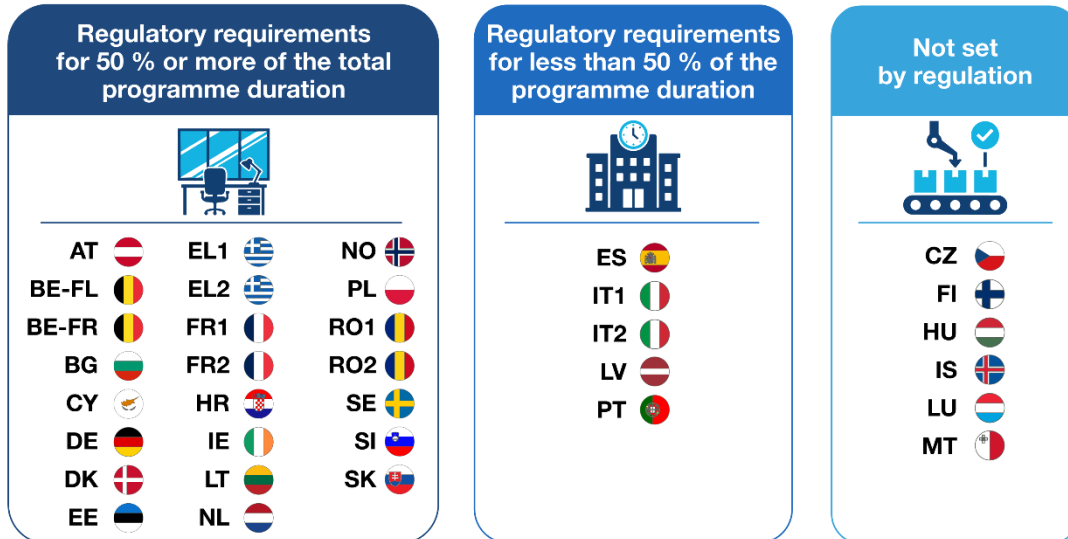
In another five of the schemes analysed (15 %), the workplace training component is set by regulation between 25 % and 50 %. In practice, it is close to 50 % for at least half of the cases reported.

The time set out for the workplace component may be expressed in different ways: as a share (e.g. 75 % of total duration) or in terms of weeks in a year (e.g. 20 weeks in a school year at the workplace), days in a week (e.g. three or four days a week at the workplace and one or two days at school), hours in a week (e.g. at least 20 hours a week at the workplace) or hours in a year (e.g. 640 hours of 1 200 hours in total to be at the workplace).

Variations of the workplace component share may exist within schemes. The share can increase by apprenticeship year (e.g. BG, HR, RO2 and SE) and can vary by qualification level for which apprenticeships are offered (e.g. BE-FL, LU

and SK), by regions (ES) or, more frequently, by occupation/sector (e.g. DK, IS and PL). More than one variation criterion may be combined (e.g. qualification level and occupation/sector).

Table 9. **Share of workplace learning**



Source: Cedefop.

2.4.3. Duration of apprenticeships (basis for estimating the workplace share)

The criterion requirement of 50 % of the apprenticeship time being spent at the workplace is covered in the vast majority of the schemes analysed. However, this criterion needs to be related to the overall duration of the apprenticeship training to which it applies. The combination of a workplace component of 50 % or higher and a meaningful overall programme duration makes it more likely that apprentices will develop a wider set of skills, values and attitudes in a real work environment, but also that employers will see benefits from the investment in this type of training.

In 24 schemes (71 %), the duration of apprenticeship programmes varies (Table 10), in several cases significantly. Variation usually depends either on the qualification level for which the programme is offered within a scheme (e.g. when the same scheme offers programmes at EQF level 2, 3 or 4) or on the sector for which the scheme is offered (e.g. within the same scheme, a programme for car mechanics might last longer than a programme for hairdressers).

In this context, it is difficult to estimate what the average duration of apprenticeships in a scheme is (it would require a detailed breakdown of enrolments by programme, which falls outside the scope of this exercise). When it comes to apprenticeship programmes at the secondary level (usually EQF level 3 or 4), the duration (i.e. the basis for calculating 50 %) is usually above two years

and in most cases it seems to be three years or even more. A shorter duration (e.g. one year) usually applies to post-secondary programmes (EQF level 5) or schemes that are extended to adults, in both cases building on prior (VET) qualifications.

Table 10. **Programme duration**

Fixed duration of apprenticeship programmes
BG: 2 years (after 3 years only at school)
BG: 5 years
CY: 3 years
EL1: 11 months (after completion of 3-year school-based VET)
EL2: 2 years
HR: 3 years
NO: 2 years (after 2 years at school)
PL: 3 years
PT: 3 years for young people, 1 year for adults' strand (apprenticeship+)
SI: 3 years
Varying duration of apprenticeship programmes
BE-FL: 1–2 years
BE-FR: 1–6 years
CZ: 3–4 years
DE: 3 or 3.5 years
DK: varies, usually 3 years (after usually 1 year at school)
EE: 3 months–2.5 years
ES: 1–3 years
FI: flexible duration
FR1: 6 months–3 years
FR2: 6–12 months per contract
HU: 2–5 years
IE: 2–4 years
IS: varies, usually 4 years
IT1: 6 months–4 years
IT2: 1–3 years
LT: flexible duration
LU: 1–4 years
MT: 1–3 years

NL: 1–4 years

RO2: varies, usually 3 years

SE: flexible duration

SK: 2–4 years

Source: Cedefop.

2.5. Criterion 5: pay and/or compensation

EFQEA criterion 5

Pay and/or compensation: Apprentices should be paid or otherwise compensated, in line with national or sectoral requirements or collective agreements where they exist and taking into account arrangements on cost-sharing between employers and public authorities.

Source: EFQEA.

Criterion 5 focuses on the presence of compensation – and its form – for the time apprentices spend at the workplace (either for learning and/or in productive tasks), and whether this extends to also cover the school-based parts of apprenticeships. It also examines the basis of this compensation, that is, whether it is in line with national or sectoral requirements or collective agreements. Another indicator refers to the variation in apprenticeship remuneration (by age, year, occupation, etc.) as an additional quality element linked to labour-market relevance and the attractiveness of apprenticeship programmes. Finally, the presence of other forms of financial support for apprentices is examined, to complement the picture of financial incentives that are universally or conditionally available. Cost-sharing arrangements between employers and public authorities are examined under criterion 10.

2.5.1. Apprentices paid or otherwise compensated

For this analysis, the term ‘wage’ refers to forms of taxable apprentice income, while the term ‘allowance’ refers to forms of non-taxable income. Even when apprentices in a certain country receive allowances from, for example, the state, these are treated as a wage if they are taxable. In all cases, apprentices receive a wage or an allowance, covering at least the workplace component of apprenticeships.

- (a) In 24 schemes (71 %), taxable remuneration (a wage) is the only option.
- (b) In six schemes, non-taxable remuneration (an allowance) is the only option.
In five of these schemes it is usually paid by the employers (CZ, HR, HU, RO2 and SI) and in one it is paid entirely by the state (PT).

- (c) In three schemes, two alternative remuneration types are possible, usually reflecting two alternative types of agreement in place (see Section 2.1.2). In those cases, the type of remuneration depends on the type of track within apprenticeships (BE-FL) or the employer's choice to pay a wage or an allowance (i.e. to select among two different contractual options; LV and SE).
- (d) In Malta, for the workplace training, apprentices receive **both** a wage from the employers and a state allowance (one third and two thirds, respectively).

According to the analysis, apprentice remuneration either can be linked only to the time spent with a training company or can be extended to also cover the time spent at school, for the theoretical part of training.

- (a) In 17 of the 34 schemes analysed (50 %), remuneration covers both the school-based and workplace components of apprenticeships. In 15 of these, this is a rule for all apprenticeships and, in the other two, this depends on:
 - (i) the contract type used (BE-FL);
 - (ii) the choice of the employer (if they want to pay for both components or only for the workplace component) (FI).
- (b) In the other 17 of the 34 schemes (50 %), remuneration covers **only** the workplace component of apprenticeships.
 - (i) In seven of these schemes, remuneration for the workplace learning is complemented by some type of additional allowance for the school-based component (CZ, EE, HR, LT, MT and SI).
 - (ii) In Malta, this is formally implemented as part of co-funding the total remuneration (two thirds comes from the state allowance) (see Section 2.5.5).

As a result, the analysis shows that, in 10 of the 34 schemes, apprentices are remunerated only for the time spent at the workplace, and no top-up / additional allowance is reported for the school-based component (i.e. they are not remunerated at all for the school-based part, which could range from 20 % to 60 % of the total programme duration in the schemes).

Example of recent relevant national activities

In **Germany**, as of 1 October 2024, the average collectively agreed apprenticeship allowance stood at EUR 1 133 per month. This represented a significant increase of 6.3 % compared with the previous year.

Source: Cedefop.

2.5.2. Compensation in line with national or sectoral requirements or collective agreements

Criterion 5 suggests that apprentices should be paid or otherwise compensated in line with national or sectoral requirements or collective agreements, where these exist. In the vast majority of schemes, the apprenticeship wage or allowance is indeed based on national regulation or collective agreements.

- (a) In 11 of the 34 schemes (32 %), compensation is set only by law. In these cases, the same remuneration is set out for all apprentices per month or per hour (EL1, EL2, MT, PT, RO1 and RO2) or it may vary within predefined limits, by apprenticeship year (SI), by apprentice age and prior education (FR2 and HU) or by year and occupation/sector (LU). In Czechia, in the recently introduced apprenticeship scheme, employers are required to pay remuneration only if the apprentice contributes to productive work – in that case, such remuneration is set by law (otherwise learners get allowances by schools).
- (b) In another seven schemes (21 %), the law sets minimum wages/allowances, but there is an explicit prerogative for training companies to offer higher wages to their apprentices (individually or at the company level) based on, for example, the quality of their work or other criteria.
- (c) In another seven schemes (21 %), compensation can be set by either collective agreements (cross-sectoral or sectoral) or national regulation. Typically, collective agreements take precedence in sectors that have them, and national regulation requirements cover apprenticeships for occupations that are not addressed by sectoral collective agreements.
- (d) In three cases (DK, IS and NO), compensation is based only on sectoral agreements.
- (e) In four cases, sectoral collective agreements are the basis of the remuneration and, if these are missing, then apprentice wages are based on negotiations between the specific company and the apprentice.
- (f) In two countries, the wage is set exclusively based on negotiations between the specific company and the apprentice (CY and LV).

2.5.3. Variation of compensation by year, qualification level or sector

While variation in apprentice wages/allowances is not explicitly referenced in the EFQEA, it is examined in this cross-country analysis, as it could possibly be considered an element of acknowledgement of apprentices' contribution to the training company or of higher relevance to labour-market needs and, in both cases, possibly a testament to programme quality.

- (a) In 21 of the 34 schemes (62 %), the wage/allowance increases progressively, usually on a yearly basis. In fewer cases, wage variation depends on the levels of training/qualifications for which the apprenticeship is offered.

- (b) In 21 schemes (62 %), the wage/allowance varies by sector or occupation (including countries where remuneration is set solely based on firm-level agreements). This is particularly notable when collective sectoral agreements are a basis for wage setting (see Section 2.5.2), but other cases exist too. For example, in Luxembourg, the wage is set by regulation, but sectoral variations are still possible.
- (c) In 15 schemes (44 %), the above can exist in combination (e.g. variation by age/level and by sector/occupation).
- (d) In seven schemes (24 %), it was not possible to identify regulatory provisions allowing variation of compensation (CZ, EL1, EL2, MT, PT, RO1 and RO2).

The combination of these options demonstrates that there is significant flexibility in relation to apprentice remuneration so that different sectoral needs are taken into consideration and/or the apprentices are rewarded for their progress and contribution (and are encouraged to complete the programme).

Variation in remuneration may contribute to programme attractiveness, higher labour-market relevance (variation based on sectoral specificities), programme completion (when remuneration progresses by year), fairness in cost sharing (increased employer contributions as apprentices become more productive or when they are trained for higher-level qualifications) and eventually the quality of apprenticeship provision.

2.5.4. Other financial support for learners

In 26 of the 34 schemes analysed (76 %), additional financial support is available for apprentices, on top of the wage or allowance paid (see Section 2.5.1).

- (a) In 53 % of the schemes analysed (18 of 34), additional financial support refers to grants to cover transport, accommodation, the purchase of equipment, meals or other costs related to participation in the apprenticeship.
- (b) In half (50 %) of the schemes analysed (17 of 34), additional payments are offered to apprentices to complement the remuneration set out. These can be grants/stipends for the school-based component (e.g. BG, MT and RO2) or learner bonuses (e.g. BE-FL). The latter may be linked to academic performance, programme completion or success in apprenticeship exams or can be used to attract learners to occupations in high demand or with skill shortages (Table 11).
- (c) In 9 of the 34 schemes (26 %), these two options coexist, namely the apprentice is entitled to both top-up payments and grants that cover transport and other costs.
- (d) In eight of the schemes (24 %), none of these options for additional financial support for apprentices was reported.

Table 11. **Examples of additional remuneration for apprentices (top-up payments)**

Scheme	Additional remuneration
AT	Criteria-based subsidies for, for example, high levels of performance in exams, participation in mobility and additional PES support for, for example, women in male-dominated fields or disadvantaged jobseekers joining apprenticeships
BE-FR	A bonus for training completion per year and for getting the qualification
BG	A bonus for high-performing students
CZ	Regional authorities grants to support VET attendance in their area of competence
EE	Scholarships for high-performing learners
FI	Allowances and family assistance by the VET provider if the apprentice does not receive a wage for the school-based component
FR1	Additional support provided by regional authorities is possible
HR	Scholarships provided by the Ministry of Economy for occupations in high demand
LU	A retroactive bonus for successful completion (EUR 130–150 per month)
PL	Examination fees covered by training companies for their apprentices
PT	Additional financial support for learners from disadvantaged families
SI	Social support for eligible students, merit-based scholarships, scholarships for shortage occupations and employer-sponsored scholarships
SK	Motivation scholarships for apprentices in occupations in high demand, scholarships for learners from disadvantaged families and a pregnancy scholarship

Source: Cedefop.

Most of the aforementioned additional financial support comes from the state (the ministry of education, the PES or VET schools) or regional authorities. Some of the additional incentives are offered by specific sectors, for example via sectoral training funds or other channels (this is possible in, for example, AT, BE-FL, BE-FR and SI).

Other types of support for apprentices (non-financial support), such as access to guidance services, programme flexibility and progression opportunities, are examined in criteria 11 and 12.

Examples of recent relevant national activities

- In **Ireland**, the access and inclusion bursary was introduced in June 2025. The bursary provides financial support of up to EUR 3 000 to eligible learners to support living costs, including travel, accommodation and materials.
- In **the Netherlands**, the ‘work agenda’ (2023) signed by national stakeholders includes a reference to reimbursement of expenses (including travel expenses), to be paid by the employers on top of the wages set out in employment contracts (in the case of dual learning).

Source: Cedefop.

2.6. Criterion 6: social protection

EFQEA criterion 6

Social protection: Apprentices should be entitled to social protection, including necessary insurance in line with national legislation.

Source: EFQEA.

A minimum degree of social protection is offered to apprentices. However, the extent of coverage of this criterion varies significantly and is strongly linked to the type of agreement set out in each apprenticeship scheme and the status that is awarded to learners (only students, only regular employees or a specific dual status of apprentice). Therefore, the indicator for criterion 6 does not simply assess the presence of any social protection provisions but includes their extent.

2.6.1. Extent of social protection

Depending on the type of agreement (a regular or specific type of contract versus other types of formal agreement), apprentices may or may not benefit from social insurance rights covering illness, disability, work-related injury, maternity, pensions, employment protection or unemployment benefits, or other employee rights such as the ability to join a trade union (Table 12).

- (a) In 23 of the 34 schemes (about 68 %), apprentices enjoy a rather comprehensive set of social protection provisions: beyond insurance linked to sickness or accidents, the schemes/contracts set out provisions linked to pensions, unemployment, insolvency, leave, maternity, etc.
- (b) In five schemes (15 %), the level of social protection varies, usually depending on the type of agreement that applies (contract or not) (EE, ES, LV and SE) or on the age of apprentices (BE-FR). In these cases, more often than not, employers choose the less binding form of agreement and, therefore, the less extended set of social protection provisions.
- (c) In another six schemes (18 %), social protection is more limited in scope, usually referring to insurance linked to sickness or accidents (typically, the status of student, not employee, is attributed to the apprentice).

Table 12. Social protection provisions for apprentices

Comprehensive set of social protection provisions	Narrower set of social protection provisions	Varying based on agreement type or age
AT, BE-FL, BG, DE, DK, EL1, EL2, FI, FR1, FR2, HU, IE, IT1, IT2, IS, LT, LU, MT, NL, NO, PL, RO1, SK	CY, CZ, HR, PT, RO2, SI	BE-FR, EE, ES, LV, SE

Source: Cedefop.

As analysed under previous criteria, the content and extent of social coverage is a significant qualitative difference stemming from the type of agreement that is applicable in each country and each apprenticeship scheme (see Section 2.1.2). Apprentices tend to be covered by a broader set of social protection provisions in schemes regulated by employment contracts or a specific type of contract subject to employment law, in which apprentices are employees or have a status associated with that of employees, at least for the workplace component. In schemes that set out formal agreements, apprentices tend not to benefit from a comprehensive set of social protection provisions or employment protection legislation.

Examples of recent relevant national activities

- In **Bulgaria**, following the 2024 VET Law amendments, the state budget covers apprentices' social insurance costs (social security and health insurance).
- In **Latvia**, new regulations (2024) set out that students participating in apprenticeships are now insured for the whole academic year and for all specialties, replacing previous partial coverage (only for the practical training and only for certain hazardous occupations).

Source: Cedefop.

2.7. Criterion 7: work, health and safety conditions

EFQEA criterion 7

Work, health and safety conditions: The host workplace should comply with relevant rules and regulations on working conditions, in particular health and safety legislation.

Source: EFQEA.

For criterion 7, the indicator refers to provisions related to workplace compliance with health and safety rules and regulations but also examines qualitative information that is of significance. First, it considers the source of such regulations (labour code, ministry decisions or softer regulatory forms such as school–company agreements), and then it looks at the mandate of labour inspection authorities in terms of intervention, monitoring such compliance and possibly issuing fines or other forms of sanctions.

2.7.1. Workplace compliance with health and safety rules and regulations

The criterion is universally addressed across the schemes analysed, when a combination of different sources and reference documents are considered

(Table 13 lists examples). In most cases, specific requirements relevant to workplace health and safety were identified to be part of the agreements / contract templates (e.g. IT1 and MT). In some cases, such requirements are set in the overarching agreements between schools and companies (e.g. CZ, not directly between learners and companies; see Section 2.1.1).

In many cases it is clearly stipulated that labour law provisions and/or collective agreement provisions regarding health and safety at the workplace are extended to apprenticeships (e.g. BG, LU and NO) and, in other cases, this is set in VET/apprenticeship laws or overarching quality frameworks (e.g. DE, EL1 and EL2).

For schemes in which accreditation of training companies applies (see Section 3.1.3), requirements for health and safety are part of the checks set out in the accreditation procedures and are included in guidelines for training companies. Finally, relevant references were identified in provisions related to sanctions on training companies for failing to meet contractual obligations.

Table 13. Examples of specific references to health and safety requirements and the sources of the requirements

Scheme	Health and safety requirements	Source of requirement
CZ	The requirements include: • attendance rules and remuneration, which may include detailed schedules; • health and safety provisions and procedures for exceptional situations.	School–company agreements
EL1, EL2	Employers must: • provide good conditions for on-the-job training, have the appropriate facilities and equipment, and designate a trainer responsible for apprentices; • meet the necessary hygiene conditions and employee safety requirements and provide them with necessary personal protective equipment during the workplace learning.	Quality framework for apprenticeships (common ministerial decision of 2017)
HR	Craftsmen and legal entities offering apprenticeships are obliged to: • ensure and implement the prescribed occupational safety and security measures during the apprenticeship training and remunerate the student; • comply with the appropriate hygienic and technical protection measures and fulfil other obligations as regulated in the apprenticeship agreement.	Accreditation procedures and relevant requirements of the chamber of trades and crafts
IT1	Typical contents of training plans are: • the final VET/educational qualification to be achieved; • the initial date and total duration; • the trial period duration; • the contractual placement and wage; • the legal and regulatory framework to be applied; • the workplace and working time; • the name of the company tutor; • other general clauses concerning safety, confidentiality and privacy.	Individual training plan

Scheme	Health and safety requirements	Source of requirement
LU	General provisions of the Labour Code that apply to apprenticeship contracts address: • the protection of young workers; • health and safety at work; • occupational health; • the protection of employees who are pregnant, are breastfeeding or have recently given birth; • protection against dismissal in the event of sick leave; • legal leave.	Labour Code
MT	The learning agreement outlines (inter alia): • placement/internship duration and work schedule; • remuneration details (when applicable); • health and safety obligations; • procedures for reporting, assessment and issue resolution.	Work-based Learning and Apprenticeship Act
NO	The Working Environment Act and other labour legislation cover the right to a safe and healthy working environment, limits on working hours and overtime, paid leave, sickness benefits and protection against discrimination and unfair dismissal. Apprentices are also covered by the employer's obligations related to occupational health and safety and have the right to follow-up and adapted training in accordance with the Education Act. Through collective agreements, apprentices may receive additional protections, including wage progression and rights linked to workplace training conditions.	Working Environment Act, Education Act and collective agreements

Source: Cedefop.

In schemes in which apprentices have the status of 'students' (see Section 2.1.2), labour inspection authorities do not have the authority to inspect workplaces and monitor the working conditions in apprenticeship schemes, including health and safety. In such cases, this task falls on the shoulders of schoolteachers or bodies that are linked to accreditation (e.g. chamber officers). This contrast is evident in the case of, for example, apprenticeships in Romania, where one scheme (RO1, apprenticeship at the workplace) falls under the remit of the national labour inspection service, but the other (RO2, VET in dual system) does not.

When labour inspection services have a clear mandate to monitor and intervene in apprenticeship agreements (contracts) (Table 14), it is also likely that breaches of regulation will result in sanctions for the training company (see Section 3.1.4).

Table 14. **Examples of labour inspection authorities monitoring workplace conditions**

Scheme	Labour inspection services
BE-FL	The Flemish Social Inspection service checks the compliance of the apprenticeship contracts with employment regulation.
BG	Apprenticeship contracts need to be approved by the Labour Inspectorate Office. The aim of this approval is to prevent the exposure of apprentices to harmful and dangerous activities while at the workplace.
CY	The employer is subject to inspections and is responsible for following the legislation for health and safety at the workplace.
FR1	In the event that the employer or the working conditions / environment offered are considered to endanger the apprentice (e.g. representing a risk to their health or physical or moral integrity), a monitoring visit can be carried out by a work inspector, possibly resulting in specific sanctions for companies.
FR2	Work inspectors, responsible for the application of the provisions governing the professionalisation contract, ensure that the contract is properly carried out.
RO1	An apprenticeship is considered an employment relationship with the training company; the responsibility falls within the remit of the labour inspectorate.

Source: Cedefop.

CHAPTER 3.

Framework conditions

Chapter 3 examines the criteria related to the framework conditions set in the EFQEA. As detailed in Section 1.1 of this report, each criterion is broken down into one or more indicators (Table 15), which allowed an analysis of the extent to which quality provisions exist across the apprenticeship schemes studied in the EU-27+ in relation to the EFQEA framework conditions.

Table 15. Breakdown of the EFQEA criteria into quality indicators: framework conditions

EFQEA criteria	Indicators
8. Regulatory framework (Section 3.1)	• Clear and consistent regulatory framework (3.1.1) • Structured dialogue among all relevant stakeholders and the roles of labour-market actors in decision-making or coordination (3.1.2) • Accreditation procedures for companies and workplaces (3.1.3) • Sanctions on companies that fail to deliver training (3.1.4)
9. Involvement of social partners (3.2)	• Role of social partners at the design level (qualifications and curricula) (3.2.1) • Role of social partners at the implementation level (3.2.2) • Contribution at the sectoral level (3.2.3)
10. Support for companies (3.3)	• Financial support (3.3.1) • Non-financial support (3.3.2) • Cost-sharing arrangements regarding apprentice remuneration, including the use of training funds (3.3.3)
11. Flexible pathways and mobility (3.4)	• Entry requirements for apprenticeship programmes (3.4.1) • Improving access through RPL or preparatory courses (3.4.2) • Apprenticeship qualifications included in the NQFs (3.4.3) • Progression opportunities (3.4.4) • Accumulation of units of learning outcomes (3.4.5) • International mobility of apprentices (3.4.6)
12. Career guidance and awareness raising (3.5)	• Awareness raising and guidance before joining apprenticeships (3.5.1) • Access to guidance during apprenticeships (3.5.2) • Access to learner support during apprenticeships (3.5.3)
13. Transparency (3.6)	• Information on apprenticeships being publicly available (3.6.1) • Apprenticeship placements being publicly available (3.6.2)
14. Quality assurance and tracking of apprentices (3.7)	• Comprehensive quality assurance mechanisms for apprenticeships (3.7.1) • Processes allowing a valid and reliable assessment of the learning outcomes (3.7.2) • Graduate-tracking mechanisms (3.7.3) • Cost-benefit analyses or stakeholder satisfaction surveys (3.7.4)

Source: Cedefop.

An overview of the framework criteria as a whole leads to a mixed picture (see more in Chapter 1). Several indicators are well addressed across most, if not all,

schemes, such as the link between apprenticeship qualifications and the NQFs, the existence of guidance services for learners and the provision of financial support and non-financial support, mainly for training companies but also quite often for apprentices too. In addition, a minimum level of monitoring exists, in all schemes, involving keeping track of enrolments and of dropouts/completions, while social partners very frequently play some role at the design level (qualifications, curricula or both).

Several of these indicators refer to areas for which the 2021 analyses had called for more attention, and they seem to be better addressed (i.e. indicators related to criteria 11–14). Even if not applicable to all the schemes analysed, at the cross-country, cross-scheme level, progress in these criteria can be seen. Moreover, despite recent activity, these criteria are not always comprehensively addressed within a country or an apprenticeship scheme. Depending on the criterion, some schemes have a wide set of quality elements in place, whereas others meet the criteria only partially and, in some cases, superficially.

Finally, there are areas that require further attention. First and foremost, although regulations covering apprenticeships exist, their clarity, and therefore clarity surrounding apprenticeship schemes, is not always guaranteed. This challenge is more prominent when apprenticeships are offered as an option in addition to school-based VET for the same qualifications, at the same level, often offered by the same VET providers. Moreover, despite reflections raised in both of the 2021 analytical exercises, in about 52 % of the schemes analysed, social partners have little or no (co-)decision-making power and play no role in coordination. At the implementation level, the role of social partners is also less prominent and somewhat polarised: in half of the schemes, social partners are present in numerous functions (accreditation, monitoring quality, supporting assessment, etc.) whereas in the other half their roles are significantly more limited. Progress since 2021 is noted, with the introduction or activation of a few new multistakeholder groups and increased input at the sectoral level (e.g. conveying labour-market needs to decision-makers), but the fundamental patterns of governance have rarely changed in the schemes analysed.

3.1. Criterion 8: regulatory framework

EFQEA criterion 8

Regulatory framework. A clear and consistent regulatory framework should be in place based on a fair and equitable partnership approach, including a structured and transparent dialogue among all relevant stakeholders. This may include accreditation

procedures for companies and workplaces that offer apprenticeships and/or other quality assurance measures.

Source: EFQEA.

Many different quality elements that can be considered parts of a clear and consistent regulatory framework are covered in other criteria (e.g. the existence of an agreement, the provision of remuneration and the presence of quality assurance measures). This section focuses first on the existence of overall regulations that are specific to apprenticeships (e.g. an apprenticeship act) or include apprenticeships as a distinct strand of VET (e.g. a VET law including specific references on what constitutes an apprenticeship in the national context). Then, it covers two specific areas of a regulatory framework, namely the accreditation procedures of companies and workplaces that offer apprenticeship placements and the presence (or absence) of sanctions on companies that fail to deliver the training expected / agreed upon.

Finally, a fair and equitable partnership approach is considered to be taken if the regulatory framework introduces joint (tripartite or multistakeholder) structures or formalises cooperation with labour-market representatives (social partners and/or chambers) with various roles and responsibilities in supporting decision-making at the national/central level. In this context, one of the indicators for this criterion includes the type of role(s) that multipartite boards/councils and other similar platforms may play in line with regulation.

3.1.1. Clear and consistent regulatory framework

In all the countries under analysis, apprenticeships are underpinned by legislation/regulations. In all the schemes analysed, there is a stable legal basis. The regulatory framework either is specifically designed for apprenticeships or includes apprenticeships in provisions that apply to all VET as a distinct option in addition to school-based tracks.

Definitions of apprenticeships and/or apprentices exist in almost all schemes (82 %), taking into account that, in some countries, other terms may be used in the national context (e.g. dual learning or simply work-based learning).

In several schemes, the clarity of regulations stems from the fact that apprenticeships are offered for specific occupations; therefore, apprenticeship programmes have distinct features in terms of the levels of programmes and qualifications compared with other VET options. In several schemes, the type of contract offered provides the basis for distinguishing apprenticeships from other VET options. As discussed in the criteria for learning and working conditions (criteria 1–7), this is usually followed by a distinct set of regulations regarding the status of learners, their remuneration and social protection, etc.

However, for some schemes, this distinction is made primarily on the basis of the share of workplace learning. In those cases, school-based VET programmes may set out lower shares of workplace training (e.g. up to 30 %), while apprenticeships represent the track on which workplace training represents 50 % or more. These cases are not always followed by a distinct set of requirements (e.g. a formal agreement and a contract covered by labour laws may coexist as options).

Therefore, even when official definitions exist, clarity in the distinction between apprenticeships and other VET options is not always guaranteed. The lack of distinct regulatory frameworks for apprenticeships (or clear distinctions from parallel school-based tracks) challenges the shared understanding among national stakeholders and poses difficulties in building an apprenticeship brand that can be attractive to learners and employers.

Examples of recent relevant national activities

- In **Czechia**, an amendment to the Education Act adopted in 2025, which has been in force since January 2026, formally embeds dual practical training in the national VET system for the first time. It builds on existing cooperation between schools and companies but introduces clearer rules, defined roles and quality assurance mechanisms to support more systematic development.
- In **Latvia**, amendments to the VET Act in 2022 formalised the term ‘work-based learning’ (the national term applying to apprenticeships), defining it as ‘a component of a full-time education process in which the learning outcomes specified for the educational programme are achieved, in accordance with the education plan, alternately at the educational institution and with the employer’.
- In **Norway**, the Completion Reform of 2021 introduced changes in the way apprenticeship schemes are implemented. A right to have an apprenticeship or an alternative form of education was introduced by law in 2022. Another measure was the introduction of the right to complete a programme at the individual apprentice’s pace.
- In **Portugal**, apprenticeship is regulated by Portaria (Ordinance) No 70/2022, which stipulated that the scheme includes both apprenticeship programmes (*cursos de aprendizagem*), typically addressed to young learners, and apprenticeship+ programmes (*cursos de aprendizagem+*) for adults.
- In **Romania**, the organisation of dual education as a form of vocational and technical education, including for multiple qualifications (levels 3, 4, etc.), is regulated by Order No 5732/2022, based on the National Education Law.
- In **Spain**, a new VET Law was introduced in 2022, which includes the regulation of apprenticeships. The law sets out the dual character of all initial VET (IVET) and parts of continuing VET / lifelong learning, making companies and education institutions share the responsibility for training students. The law sets out two pathways (general VET and intensive VET), of which the intensive pathway meets the characteristics of an apprenticeship programme, in relation to the Council recommendation on the EFQEA (higher shares of workplace training, a specific type of employment contract for the apprentice, etc.).

Source: Cedefop.

3.1.2. Structured dialogue among all relevant stakeholders and the roles of labour-market actors in decision-making or coordination

Platforms for systematic and structured dialogue among key stakeholders generally exist (Table 16). This level of involvement of social partners and other key stakeholders often involves discussing or deciding on which occupations can be accessed through apprenticeships or what (levels of) apprenticeship qualifications should be used and under which key features apprenticeship programmes should operate (remuneration, quality, etc.).

However, significant differences can be observed in terms of (a) the level of stakeholder (co-)decision-making powers (discussed in the next criterion) or (b) the range of stakeholders who are regularly part of such dialogue. Social partners or chambers have enhanced co-deciding powers or coordinating roles in fewer than half of the schemes analysed, through joint tripartite coordination bodies or by participating in multistakeholder councils/boards on an equal footing with state authorities.

- (a) In 16 of the 34 schemes analysed (47 %), fair and equitable partnership approaches are evident in joint tripartite coordinating bodies or multistakeholder councils/boards with significant co-deciding power (including chambers or boards of national agencies with similar mandates). These offer platforms of regular, structured dialogue on an equal footing between the state and social partners or chambers. In this respect, these coordinating or co-deciding roles of social partners can be seen as enablers of improved labour-market responsiveness, increased ownership, stronger investment and overall higher quality.
- (b) In 11 of the 34 schemes analysed (32 %), although ministries or national VET institutions/secretariats play the main coordinating/decision-making role, a multistakeholder advisory board usually exists as a platform for regular consultation, or employer and employee representatives are consulted via less centralised channels (e.g. sectoral-level bodies) and/or participate in technical activities with a narrower mandate (e.g. only qualifications or curricula update) (see Section 3.2.1).
- (c) In seven schemes (21 %), there was little evidence of a structured process of stakeholder consultation at the design/decision-making stages. Such consultation may exist, but perhaps on a more ad hoc basis (e.g. in the context of a curriculum reform or a qualifications update).

Table 16. **Multipartite boards/councils with advisory, coordinating or co-deciding roles or schemes where chambers play a central role**

Scheme	Board, council or similar body	Role
AT	- Federal Advisory Board on Apprenticeship - Chambers of employers and employees	Co-deciding
BE-FL	Flemish Partnership for Dual Learning	Mixed (strategic, technical and advisory)
BE-FR	Office francophone de la Formation en alternance (OFFA; the alternance steering body)	Coordinating
BG	Consultative Council for VET	Advisory
CY	Apprenticeship Board	Advisory
CZ	National Council for Qualifications	Technical and advisory
DE	- Chambers of commerce, trade and crafts - Federal state boards - Board of the Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB)	Mixed (co-deciding, technical and advisory)
DK	- National advisory council on vocational upper secondary education and training - Trade committees	Mixed (co-deciding, technical and advisory)
EL1, EL2	Central Council for Vocational Education and Training (KSEEEK)	Advisory
ES	General Council for VET	Advisory
FI	Various collaborative networks	Advisory and technical
FR1, FR2	- National Council for Guidance and Vocational Training for Skills Development - France Compétence (board includes social partners)	Mixed (co-deciding, technical and advisory)
HR	Chamber of trades and crafts	Coordinating
HU	Hungarian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MKIK)	Coordinating
IE	National Apprenticeship Alliance	Mixed (strategic and advisory)
IS	Occupational councils	Mixed (co-deciding, technical and advisory)
LU	Chambers of employers and employees	Co-deciding and technical
MT	- National Skills Council - Board of MCAST	Advisory
NL	Board of the Foundation for Cooperation on Vocational Education, Training and the Labour Market (SBB)	Mixed (co-deciding and technical)
NO	- National Council for VET (SRY) - Vocational training councils	Mixed (co-deciding, technical and advisory)
PL	- Polish Craft Association - Craft chambers	Coordinating, co-deciding and technical
PT	Board of the Instituto de Emprego e Formação Profissional (IEFP; the Portuguese PES)	Mixed (co-deciding and technical)
SE	National programme councils	Advisory and technical
SI	- Council of VET Experts - Chambers	Technical
SK	National VET Council	Advisory

Source: Cedefop.

Dialogue among stakeholders can also take place in more targeted formats, in the context of:

- (a) sectoral councils, which are typically involved in identifying and conveying labour-market needs and in developing/approving qualifications – these were identified in 21 of the 34 schemes (62 %);
- (b) joint technical structures at the national, regional or local level, which are typically involved in monitoring, accreditation or support for schools and companies – these were identified in 14 schemes (41 %).

When it comes to the **participation of learners** in structured dialogue, in several cases, when they are considered employees, apprentices can join and be represented by their trade unions. There is considerably less evidence that apprentice organisations exist at the national level and participate (systematically) in stakeholder dialogue (e.g. FI, FR, IE and NL). For example, in Ireland, apprentices are represented on the top multistakeholder body with strategic powers, the National Apprenticeship Alliance. In France, the National Association of Apprentices (ANAF) sits on various representative bodies (e.g. the Economic, Social, Environmental and Regional Council (CESER) and the Youth Policy Orientation Council (COJ) and promotes the voice of apprentices at all levels (regional and national). In the Netherlands, the Youth Organisation for Vocational Education (Jongeren Organisatie Beroepsonderwijs (JOB)) is the most active learner organisation in VET, including apprentice voices. In Denmark, apprentice associations and initiatives are most often organised in the trade committees at the national and local levels.

Examples of recent relevant national activities

- In **Ireland**, the National Apprenticeship Alliance was established in March 2022 by the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science. The alliance supports and advises the National Apprenticeship Office on the development of the apprenticeship system and the development of new apprenticeships. Its membership comprises representatives from the Department of Further and Higher Education, employers (including at the national, sectoral and enterprise levels), trade unions / employee representatives, further education and training and higher education providers, and apprentices.
- In **Slovenia**, since 2024, a committee to monitor the implementation of the apprenticeship path has been in place. It consists of six members, appointed on the proposal of the authorised chambers; ministries of education, labour and the economy; trade unions; employers; and schools. The committee prepares an annual monitoring report, develops recommendations for effective implementation of apprenticeships and proposes measures for further developments to the minister.
- In **Romania**, in 2024, 29 regional consortia for dual education started their work by creating a cooperation environment for all stakeholders investing in a joint effort to support dual VET, based on local/regional labour-market needs. They include representatives from administrative territorial units, universities, IVET schools and

employers. Joint working groups for the update of IVET curricula were established, and consultation/advisory meetings with public authorities on IVET and higher education started.

Source: Cedefop.

3.1.3. Accreditation procedures for companies and workplaces

As part of a clear regulatory framework, structured accreditation procedures for a company to provide apprenticeship training were identified in a little more than half of the schemes analysed (18 of 34, 53 %). Such procedures are typically carried out by chambers or joint sectoral bodies. In fewer cases, there is some other centralised assessment of interested companies by, for example, national VET institutions or technical, coordinating services of VET providers (Table 17).

These procedures can include the accreditation of the company as a learning venue and/or the accreditation of in-company trainers involved in apprenticeships. In the latter case, training programmes are usually offered to people who want to engage as trainers but lack the specified qualifications (see Section 2.3.2).d

Table 17. **Accreditation procedures**

Chambers of employer organisations
AT: regional offices of the Austrian Economic Chambers
CZ: employer organisations (titled ‘organisations of dual training providers’)
DE: chambers / competent bodies
HR: Croatian Chamber of Trades and Crafts
HU: chamber of commerce and industry
LU: professional chambers
PL: craft guilds for their member companies (companies outside craft guilds may also offer apprenticeships)
Joint sectoral partners or employer organisations
BE-FL: sectoral partnerships, delegated by the Flemish Partnership for Dual Learning
BE-FR: sectoral partners represented on the Office francophone de la Formation en alternance (OFFA) board (the alternance steering body)
DK: social partners at trade committees
IS: occupational councils
NL: social partners represented in the Foundation for Cooperation on Vocational Education, Training and the Labour Market (SBB)
NO: county municipalities (apprenticeship councils at the county level)
SI: the Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Chamber of Craft and Small Business and the Slovenian Chamber of Commerce

SK: county authorisation committees (in which employer and employee representatives participate) and 'sectoral assignees'
Other bodies (e.g. training providers)
IE: Further Education and Training Authority
MT: MCAST
PT: Instituto de Emprego e Formação Profissional (IEFP) (the Portuguese PES)

Source: Cedefop.

In the absence of such structured accreditation processes, the responsibility usually falls on the shoulders of schoolteachers or school leaders. For example, in Finland, VET providers are responsible for, among other things, assessing the suitability of the workplace regarding workplace learning. In Sweden, the school is responsible for ensuring that the training company offers a good work environment and meets regulatory requirements. Setting this responsibility entirely on the shoulders of VET providers increases the workload for school staff assigned to such tasks (schools may already face staff capacity challenges) and has implications for the transparency of the process (as no other parties are involved).

3.1.4. Sanctions on companies that fail to deliver training

In 19 of the 34 schemes analysed (56 %), sanctions can be imposed on companies if they fail to deliver training or contravene legislation related to labour regulations (see Section 2.7.1). Among these schemes:

- (a) nine schemes set out sanctions related to withdrawal of accreditation (i.e. the company loses the right to train);
- (b) nine schemes set out financial penalties, namely regulatory fines, the return of subsidies/support received for training an apprentice or the reclassification of contracts as regular contracts (FR2) and, therefore, the loss of any relevant financial support for training companies;
- (c) two schemes (PL and SK) set out that these two types of sanctions may be applied in combination.

It has to be noted that the presence of clear sanctions on training companies is strongly associated with the pre-existence of systematic accreditation procedures. Schemes that set out such systematic accreditation procedures usually set out the responsibilities for monitoring apprenticeship delivery and include a list of sanctions in case employers fail to meet the relevant requirements. Conversely, only 5 of the 16 schemes with less formalised accreditation procedures have some type of specific sanction in place, and this is usually linked to working conditions (not learning conditions).

In 44 % of the schemes analysed, no particular sanctions exist. If a company fails to provide the agreed training (or contravenes legislation related to labour

regulations), the only repercussion is termination of the ongoing apprenticeship contract/agreement.

3.2. Criterion 9: involvement of social partners

EFQEA criterion 9

Involvement of social partners. Social partners – including, where relevant, at the sectoral level and/or intermediary bodies – should be involved in the design, governance and implementation of apprenticeship schemes, in line with national industrial relations systems and education and training practices.

Source: EFQEA.

Criterion 8 confirms the prior Cedefop analysis (Cedefop, 2021) that countries envisage a minimum level of fair and equitable partnership based on structured dialogue among stakeholders, but this dialogue often remains at an advisory level. Therefore, the analysis of criterion 9 delves deeper into the roles, responsibilities and contributions of social partners. Here, the first aim is to investigate more closely the involvement of social partners at the design stage (e.g. through co-shaping qualifications or curricula), and then the second aim is to explore similar contributions and roles at the implementation level. The third indicator refers to the sectoral level: whether sectoral bodies (often including both employer and employee representative organisations) make a contribution to apprenticeship design by, for example, informing stakeholders of labour-market needs.

3.2.1. Role of social partners at the design level (qualifications and curricula)

In all schemes, social partners are involved in designing qualifications or designing curricula or, quite frequently, in both:

- (a) a role for social partners in shaping qualifications was identified in 32 of the 34 schemes (94 %);
- (b) a role for social partners in shaping curricula/standards was identified in 27 schemes (79 %).

Moreover, other contributions at the design level include contributions to the definition of occupational standards (BE-FR and HR) or examination standards (PL) and making decisions on which occupations should be trained through apprenticeships and their classification/level in the education system (IT) or their length and the division of learning among the venues (DK).

3.2.2. Role of social partners at the implementation level

At the implementation level, the role of social partners is less prominent (than at the design level) and somewhat limited. The analysis examined different functions at the implementation level in which social partners may be involved: (a) accrediting companies, (b) monitoring the quality of in-company training, (c) participating in the (final) assessment of apprentices and (d) other functions, usually related to promoting apprenticeships to employers or learners.

- (a) In most schemes (29 of 34, 85 %), it was identified that social partners or chambers play a strong role in promoting apprenticeships among individual companies and potential learners.
- (b) In 21 of the 34 schemes analysed (62 %), social partners play a role in the (final) assessment of apprentices. They do so by assigning representatives in examination boards, especially in relation to practical exams / demonstrations of competences in the final assessment of apprentices.
- (c) In 17 of the 34 schemes analysed (50 %), social partners or chambers play a role in monitoring the quality of in-company training, often through a representative body of theirs at the local level.
- (d) In 16 of the schemes analysed (47 %), social partners or chambers play a role in accrediting companies.

Analysis of the combinations of the different roles at the implementation level gives a mixed, potentially polarised, picture.

- (a) In only 15 of the 34 schemes (44 %), the role of social partners is very extensive at the implementation level. In these cases, they play a role in three or four of the aforementioned functions.
- (b) In 11 schemes (32 %), social partners play a medium-level role at the implementation level, being active in two of the four possible functions, with one of the two often referring to the promotion of apprenticeships.
- (c) In eight schemes (24 %), the role of social partners is much more limited. It was identified that they are involved in one possible type of contribution (e.g. only in promoting apprenticeships to individual companies).

3.2.3. Contribution at the sectoral level

The representation of sectors is notable. Sectoral councils were identified in approximately 62 % of the schemes analysed (see Section 3.1.2), usually involved in skills anticipation and qualification or curriculum development. Their role is also important in the training of in-company trainers, and when countries base wages and contracts on sectoral collective agreements and (in about 25 % of the schemes) when sectoral training funds can be used by participating companies.

Example of recent relevant national activities

In **Poland**, sectoral skills centres were introduced in 2023. Their key activities include VET, integration and support, innovation and development, professional counselling and the promotion of VET. As part of their activities, the centres carry out annual analyses of the labour-market demand for skills, qualifications and professions in each sector, which are submitted to the Educational Research Institute ahead of the annual forecast of the demand for employees in vocational education professions.

Source: Cedefop.

3.3. Criterion 10: support for companies

EFQEA criterion 10

Support for companies. Financial and/or non-financial support should be provided, particularly for micro-, small and medium-sized companies, enabling cost-effective apprenticeships for companies. Such support should take into account, when appropriate, cost-sharing arrangements between employers and public authorities.

Source: EFQEA.

Past Cedefop work, such as the publication [Apprenticeships: Incentives for employers and learners](#) (Cedefop, 2025) and Cedefop's [financing apprenticeships database](#), has already demonstrated the variation in the different incentives that exist to increase (learner and) employer participation, which include financial and non-financial, general and targeted, incentives. This analysis looks in greater detail at the different financial instruments and forms of non-financial support provided for training companies, and how employers and the state (or, in certain cases, regions and other actors) share remuneration-related costs. The indicators for this criterion include:

- (a) the types of financial support provided for training companies, how often different types of support are combined and whether these are linked with specific policy objectives in terms of, for example, learner groups, sectors/occupations and geographical areas;
- (b) the types of non-financial support provided and how often these are combined in a comprehensive set of support provisions for training companies;
- (c) whether employers and the state share parts of the costs related to apprenticeship remuneration (wages or allowances), including whether training funds are used for this purpose.

3.3.1. Financial support

The analysis of apprenticeship schemes shows that financial support for companies that participate in apprenticeships can be identified in all but two schemes (94 %). Financial support can take various forms:

- (a) grants (subsidies) related to apprentice remuneration costs were identified in 25 of the 34 schemes (74 %);
- (b) tax deductions or tax rebates for companies participating in apprenticeships (e.g. FR1, FR2, HR, HU, MT, RO2 and SK), including reduced or fully waived social protection contributions (e.g. AT, BG, ES, FR1, IT1, IT2 and LU), were identified in half of the schemes (17 of 34, 50 %);
- (c) other types of support were identified in 21 of the schemes (62 %), with, more often than not, schemes offering a combination of financial support:
 - (i) appointing (trained) in-company trainers (e.g. the ‘tutor premium’ in BE-FR, the fee for mentors in HR and the bonus for trainers who completed an accredited training programme in SE) and/or reimbursing their wages, as compensation for their time dedicated to training apprentices (e.g. BG, EE, ES and LT);
 - (ii) incentives to get more apprentices per year (DK: EUR 3 550 bonus for any extra apprentice per year),
 - (iii) incentives to hire apprentices for specific learner groups (e.g. AT, BG, DE, FR1, FR2 and IE);
 - (iv) incentives for companies to hire their former apprentices upon graduation or the extension of incentives after graduation if the company hires the apprentice (BE-FR, ES, IT1 and IT2);
 - (v) subsidies covering the cost of the materials, tools and equipment used in apprenticeship training (e.g. CZ, HR, NL and RO2);
- (d) in 20 of the 34 schemes analysed (59 %), two or more **different types** of financial support coexist (grants, tax deduction and other means);
- (e) in 10 of the 34 schemes (30 %), only **one type** of support exists, usually grants subsidising part of the apprentice remuneration (but more than one instrument of the same type may exist, for example a bonus to get an apprentice and a bonus if the apprentice completes the qualification);
- (f) there are only two schemes for which no financial incentives for training companies are reported.

Financial support related to apprenticeship quality or outcomes was identified in 13 schemes (41 % of the 32 schemes that offer some form of financial support). This is often linked to programme completion (a bonus for companies whose apprentices reach the final qualification or subsidies linked to such accomplishment, for example in BE-FR, HU, NL and PL) or quality improvements for the apprenticeship offer, such as incentives for companies to prepare for

accreditation procedures or to set up partnerships. Examples include support for building training alliances to ensure that complete training is offered to apprentices (AT and DE), grants linked to providing training for in-company trainers (BE-FL and SE), compensation for company costs to secure accreditation (HR), apprenticeship development funding for potential apprenticeship consortia (IE), funding for coordination procedures (LV), and to cover the costs for the organisation and coordination of workplace learning activities (LT).

The analysis has also demonstrated the following.

- (a) In more than half of the schemes that offer financial incentives (17 of 32, 53 %), incentives are horizontal, namely they do not vary according to factors such as company size, learner group, sector or region.
- (b) In the rest of the schemes, different factors may affect the type and volume of financial support for participating companies.
 - (i) Learner group-related variations of financial support were identified in at least 10 schemes (incentives to hire older learners, learners from groups at risk or female learners in male-dominated occupations, etc.).
 - (ii) Sector-related variations of financial support were identified in five schemes, with such variations usually linked to additional support for sectors with higher labour shortages or greater growth prospects. Variation can take the form of additional financial support for sectoral training funds, which can be used only by employers within the sectors in question.
 - (iii) Company size-related variations in financial support were identified in only five schemes.
 - (iv) Region-related variations in financial support were identified in four schemes.

While horizontal incentives are easier to manage, customisation may increase relevance and attractiveness for different possible target groups.

Further dedicated research could provide further insights into the height and the reach of these criteria and may help identify smaller-scale financial instruments that are targeted to a niche set of training companies.

Examples of recent relevant national activities

- In **Austria**, the 'Digi-Cheque' (*Digi-Scheck*) initiative (2023–2024) by the Federal Ministry of Labour and Economy fully funds up to EUR 500 per training measure in digitalisation and climate protection areas for eligible apprentices.
- In **Estonia**, in 2023, the VET and higher education development programme PRÕM+ (a follow-up of the former PRÕM programme) was adopted by the

Ministry of Education to support training companies. After 2029, apprenticeship training is planned to be funded solely through state funds.

- In **Ireland**, as of 2022, employers participating in consortia-led apprenticeships are eligible to receive a EUR 2 000 grant annually for each newly registered apprentice, per year of the apprenticeship. This means that employers with apprentices on two-year programmes are eligible for a payment of EUR 4 000 over the duration of the programme, and employers with apprentices on four-year apprenticeships are eligible for a payment of EUR 8 000.
- In **Italy**, incentives for training companies to retain apprentices after graduation have been introduced in recent years. Type 1 contracts may be transformed into a professional apprenticeship (type 2 scheme) for a further year, giving employers an incentive to hire the apprentice, with significant deductions in social security contributions compared with those required to hire a qualified worker. Furthermore, the apprentice may be hired by the same company under a type 3 apprenticeship (Law No 203/2024).

Source: Cedefop.

3.3.2. Non-financial support

In nearly all schemes, at least one type of non-financial support to employers is offered to companies interested in joining or already participating in apprenticeships. The analysis intends to focus on more permanent, well-established measures available for employers; therefore, ad hoc support that takes place at the implementation level may not be captured or is under-represented in the current exercise. Among the categories of non-financial support that were studied, the following findings were identified.

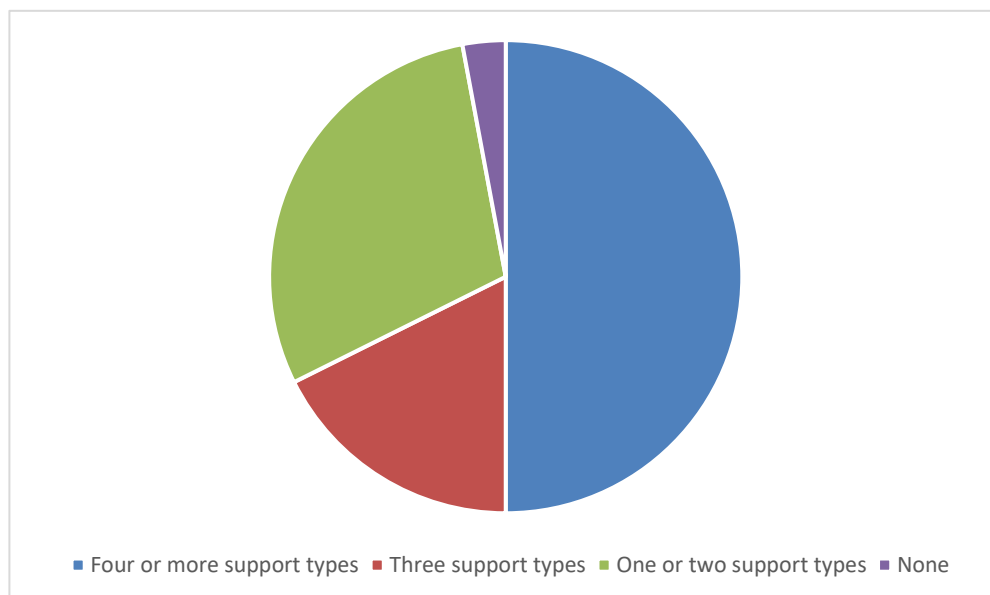
- (a) In 25 of the 34 schemes analysed (74 %), systematic campaigns to raise awareness, attract companies and promote the main features of apprenticeship participation exist (physical or online).
- (b) In 22 of the 34 schemes (65 %), training opportunities for in-company trainers were identified, either as part of accreditation requirements (mandatory) or for their CPD (optional). These are offered by chambers, schools or sectoral bodies.
- (c) In 22 schemes (65 %), cases of regular support provided by chambers, central education structures or other intermediary bodies were identified, in relation to how companies can join apprenticeships and/or organise and deliver workplace training.
- (d) In 20 schemes (59 %), online platforms and/or centralised registries exist for companies to post their available apprenticeship placements. These platforms usually support company–apprentice matching and can be either in the public domain (online job sites, which are general or apprenticeship specific) or restricted access (run by, for example, national institutions, ministries or public employment agencies).
- (e) References to specific guidelines for day-to-day collaboration between schools and companies were identified in 50 % of the schemes (17 of 34).

- (f) Other types of non-financial support were identified in 15 schemes, including support by VET schools to screen suitable apprentices (several schemes), access to inter-company training facilities (several schemes), digitalising the processes to participate in apprenticeships (AT), introducing a digital logbook to support teacher–trainer collaboration (IS) and administrative procedure simplification (SK).

This analysis reveals that a wide range of possible ways to attract and support training companies is in place across the schemes analysed. However, when looking at the coexistence of the various forms of non-financial support (i.e. how many types of the six forms analysed are offered in each scheme; Figure 1), some notable distinctions emerge:

- (a) in half of the schemes analysed (17 or 34, 50 %), four or more types of non-financial support are available to companies, creating a comprehensively enabling environment for training companies;
- (b) in another six schemes (18 %), an average support level (three of the six possible support types) was identified;
- (c) in 10 schemes (29 %), two types of financial support are reported;
- (d) for one scheme, no type of non-financial support was reported.

Figure 1. Extent of non-financial support, by number of support types offered



Source: Cedefop.

Examples of recent relevant national activities

- In **Belgium (French Community)**, the regional technological centres have, since 2024/2025, provided support to companies that are engaged in dual learning (or are interested in doing so) and helped them get in contact with training providers.
- In **Croatia**, in 2025, the Chamber of Trades and Crafts developed online modules for future and existing in-company trainers as a means of providing support in training apprentices (the e-mentor Erasmus+ project aiming to improve VET quality).
- In **Czechia**, the Confederation of Industry has developed a checklist for the purpose of dual practical education (named the 'standard for dual practical education') as a practical tool for establishing cooperation between companies and schools. It guides the cooperating entities through all of the key procedural and organisational steps undertaken when providing practical vocational training in workplaces.
- In **Malta**, in January 2024, MCAST organised its first apprenticeship onboarding event, connecting eligible students with 67 industry partners over a four-day period and supporting early matching between learners and employers.
- In **Slovakia**, the 2025 VET Act amendment is intended to reduce the administrative burden for small companies, with a view to increasing their participation in dual VET.
- In **Spain**, the 2022 Organic VET Law increased the focus on intermediate bodies that can promote and assist in apprenticeships and advise and involve companies in training, while acting as a link with VET school and regulators. At the same time, the law stipulates that intermediate bodies can group SMEs together for the implementation of apprenticeships, to complement learning outcomes and to facilitate knowledge sharing and best practices among SMEs.
- In **Sweden**, an apprenticeship centre was set up at the National Agency for Education, following a government decision (2023) to further support VET providers, employers and social partners in developing apprenticeship education and the quality of workplace-based learning.

Source: Cedefop.

3.3.3. Cost-sharing arrangements regarding apprentice remuneration, including the use of training funds

In most cases, the state contributes to costs related to theoretical education (school-based component), while training companies contribute by paying the wages/allowances, and also through the time of their trainers, the use of equipment, etc. Analysis of criterion 10 also shows that financial support for employers for the costs related to wages is provided in almost all schemes by state budgets, EU funds or training funds. Therefore, costs related to apprentice pay/remuneration are typically based on a substantial cost-sharing arrangement in nearly all the schemes studied (approximately 80 %).

In a few cases, however, cost-sharing arrangements for apprentice remuneration are not clearly set out in regulation or are not equitable in practice.

- (a) In Portugal, employers do not pay a wage or an allowance. In Sweden, the state covers the allowance when companies choose to pay apprentices without a labour contract (two options for agreement and pay are available).
- (b) In a few more schemes, while employers pay the apprentice wage, this is either heavily subsidised (e.g. EL1 and EL2) or greatly complemented by state support (e.g. in MT, companies contribute one third of the total remuneration and a state stipend covers the remaining two thirds of it).
- (c) In Czechia, in the recently established scheme, employers are not required to provide remuneration to apprentices. Remuneration is required only when it is established that apprentices contribute to productive work, and only for the part of their time that they spend in the company. This is something that is negotiated between the training company and the VET school. In Sweden, employers may decide not to sign a contract with the apprentice and not to take over parts of the apprentice remuneration.
- (d) Conversely, in Cyprus, employers are required to pay the wage but do not receive any form of financial support.

Many of these variations reflect the challenge of attracting employers to apprenticeships, especially if the tradition of apprenticeship training is not widespread in the national context. While such arrangements help attract employers in the short or medium run, they are likely to eventually lead to challenges related to the sustainability of financing and the equitability of contributions, but also skewed perceptions of apprenticeship value and benefits.

The possibility of mobilising resources from training funds to support training companies was identified in only 11 of the 34 schemes (32 %). In some cases, this refers to sectoral funds (i.e. the funds do not cover the full range of training companies). In addition, in 2 of these 11 schemes, the possibility is rather theoretical (i.e. it is not regularly applied to apprenticeships). This is an area for further consideration, given the fact that training funds are used more extensively in other forms of education and training, especially in adult learning, where they have been proven to be a sustainable and considerably equitable form of financing education and training.

3.4. Criterion 11: flexible pathways and mobility

EFQEA criterion 11

Flexible pathways and mobility. To facilitate access, entry requirements for apprenticeships should take into account relevant informal and non-formal learning and/or, if relevant, the completion of preparatory programmes. Qualifications acquired through apprenticeships should be included in nationally recognised qualification

frameworks referenced in the EQF. Apprenticeships should allow access to other learning opportunities (including higher education and training), career pathways and/or, where relevant, the accumulation of units of learning outcomes. The transnational mobility of apprentices, either at the workplace or in education and training institutions, should be progressively promoted as a component of apprenticeship qualifications.

Source: EFQEA.

Criterion 11 combines the expectation of apprenticeship qualifications being linked to NQFs (and referenced in the EQF) with the integration of agility elements that take into consideration a variety of learning experiences and, in many cases, promote them (e.g. in the context of the international mobility of apprentices). On the one hand, the indicators examined for this criterion look for flexibility in regulatory frameworks and attractive entry conditions that support learner access to apprenticeships. On the other hand, they support programme completion and the attainment of qualifications that not only allow a successful transition into the labour market but also underpin future career progression and lifelong learning. In short, the indicators included in this criterion examine:

- (a) what the entry requirements are for apprenticeship programmes, in relation to the age and/or entry levels that apply to prospective apprenticeships and whether these allow participation by (young) adults;
- (b) if access to apprenticeship programmes is supported by preparatory courses and processes that recognise prior learning and whether such RPL/validation arrangements are used to shorten the programme duration or to award parts of or the whole qualification;
- (c) whether apprenticeship qualifications are included in NQFs and at which level(s) of the EQF these are typically offered;
- (d) based on these qualifications, what the opportunities are for apprentices to progress to higher education and further training, either in post-secondary/non-tertiary programmes or in higher education;
- (e) what approaches to the accumulation of learning outcomes are followed and how these approaches can support the flexibility of apprenticeship programmes;
- (f) what the arrangements are that support the international mobility of apprentices and how comprehensive the approaches followed are in the apprenticeship schemes studied.

3.4.1. Entry requirements for apprenticeship programmes

Entry into apprenticeship programmes is usually regulated, at least in terms of the minimum age of learners or the prior education level that needs to be achieved before learners join apprenticeships. However, upper age limits are not set with the same frequency.

- (a) In 12 of the 34 schemes (35 %), there are specific requirements for both the minimum age and the maximum age of learners when they enrol in an apprenticeship programme.
- (b) In 20 schemes (57 %), only minimum requirements are set. These are expressed either as a minimum age for learners or as completion of a certain level of education, with national regulations using different references (e.g. apprentices must have completed lower secondary education or compulsory education in, for example, DE and LT).

In the remaining schemes, different specifications apply. In Sweden, only an upper age limit is set (learners have to be up to 20 years old to enrol in upper secondary VET, under which the scheme is offered). In Estonia, no age-related requirements are set.

In some cases, two options may coexist. In Belgium (French Community), programmes for young people set both minimum and maximum age limits (15–25 years), whereas programmes for adults only set a minimum age (18 years). In Slovakia, while age-related requirements are set for young apprentices (who represent the majority of all apprentices), no age limits exist for higher-level professional programmes.

The absence of upper age limits in most apprenticeship schemes reflects to some degree the policy initiatives of past decades to increase the openness of VET/apprenticeship systems and to extend the use of apprenticeships by different learner groups, above the age of 18 or 24 years, which used to be the typical enrolment age in several countries. Cedefop's European database on apprenticeship schemes shows that the average age of learners in apprenticeship schemes in the EU-27+ is more frequently in the 18–24 or 24+ age bracket and less frequently in the 15–18 group (factsheet on apprenticeship attractiveness, 2026, forthcoming).

Examples of recent relevant national activities

- In **Belgium (Flemish Community)**, the apprenticeship scheme was expanded to adult secondary education in 2022. A 2022 decree concerning certain aspects of dual learning in adult education (*Decreet tot regeling van bepaalde aspecten van duale opleidingen in het volwassenenonderwijs*) regulates how dual learning is organised for adults.
- In **Ireland**, efforts are made to ensure that the apprenticeship population is more representative of the population generally, including women and other groups under-represented in apprenticeships. An access and inclusion subcommittee of

the National Apprenticeship Alliance was also established in January 2023 to support this aim.

- In **Portugal**, the apprenticeship scheme was expanded to adults (apprenticeship+ programmes (*cursos de aprendizagem+*)) in 2022.

Source: Cedefop.

3.4.2. Improving access through RPL or preparatory courses

In principle, arrangements for RPL and validation that are set in place to cover all education, or all VET, may apply to apprentices too, especially for those programmes in which the school-based component is provided in common with other VET strands (or offered by the same providers).

However, it is not always clear if such overarching RPL/validation arrangements actually include apprenticeships specifically. Especially in cases when the introduction of validation arrangements in education and training / VET is gradual, such validation procedures often begin in other education and training strands before they reach learners in apprenticeship programmes. Therefore, beyond the existence of umbrella arrangements, the analysis intends to focus on cases of RPL arrangements that are designed to apply (or are clearly reported as applying) to apprenticeships too.

- (a) In 19 of the 34 schemes analysed (56 %), it was possible to identify apprenticeship-specific regulations or arrangements for the RPL or overarching validation arrangements that can clearly apply to apprenticeship pathways/programmes as well (Table 18).
- (b) In the remaining cases, overarching (VET-wide) RPL/validation arrangements may apply, but they were not clearly identified or explicitly reported. There are also cases in which RPL procedures are only piloted in certain programmes/occupations (e.g. hairdressers in Ireland and car mechanics and confectioners in Hungary); therefore, they were not considered to be cases of the fully fledged introduction of validation/RPL arrangements.

In most of the cases identified, validation/RPL procedures lead to exemptions for part of the programme, varying from skipping certain modules/courses (e.g. DK, FR1 and IT1) to enrolling on the second year of the programme (e.g. AT, LU and NL).

Full exemption from attending a whole programme may be theoretically possible in several of the schemes, but this does not seem to be commonly used as an option. References to full exemptions were less conclusive in most cases. An example of exemption comes from Germany, where learners who provide evidence of sufficient work experience (1.5 times longer than the corresponding programme) may be admitted to final examinations without taking formal training.

Table 18. RPL applying to apprentices

Scheme	Forms of RPL
AT	Upper secondary education graduates who start an apprenticeship enter the programme in year 2.
BE-FL	RPL is commonly used in adult education.
BE-FR	Individuals who have already demonstrated certain competences through formal education or other credentials (e.g. a validation of competences certificate) may be eligible for exemptions from certain courses or modules.
CZ	VET school programmes can be shortened if the school director considers that the learner has completed a relevant programme at the same EQF level(s).
DE	Learners who give evidence of a period of relevant work experience that is at least 1.5 times as long as the regular training period for the occupation in question can be admitted to the final examination (<i>Externenprüfung</i> , i.e. examination of external candidates) without taking formal training. Apprentices with an advanced school-leaving certificate such as the <i>Abitur</i> (university entrance qualification) have the opportunity to reduce the training period by one year if the employer providing in-company training agrees.
DK	Adults over 25 years of age can follow shortened pathways (adult vocational programmes, EUV) to VET/apprenticeship qualifications based on IVET programmes. Those with less than two years of work experience need an apprenticeship contract with a company, but the duration of the basic school-based part of the programme is at least 10 % shorter than the usual duration for younger learners.
EE	RPL (referred to as <i>VÕTA</i> in Estonian) is available to all VET school students, including apprentices.
ES	Exemptions for (part of) VET programmes are possible by means of the validation of competences acquired through work experience and non-formal learning (<i>acreditación de competencias</i>).
FI	Prior learning acquired in different ways, including through non-formal and informal learning, can be identified and recognised as part of the studies.
FR1	It is possible to set a contract duration that takes account of the apprentice's skills acquired prior to training. Validation is one of the options to access the same VET qualifications. The duration of the apprenticeship contract may be reduced following an assessment by the apprenticeship training centre of the apprentice's initial skill level or skills acquired, for example during a period of international mobility.
FR2	It is possible to adjust the apprenticeship contract duration to take into account the apprentice's skills acquired prior to joining the programme. Consequently, apprenticeship contracts leading to the same qualification may have different durations, depending on apprentices' profiles.
IT1	There are procedures in place to recognise prior learning and shorten the learning pathway. All qualifications awarded through type 1 apprenticeships are formal VET qualifications, which may be certified through RPL procedures.
IT2	There are procedures in place to recognise prior learning and shorten the learning pathway.
LU	In some cases, other qualifications, internships or previous experience may be recognised and contribute to, for example, whether apprentices start in the second year of training. The duration of an adult apprenticeship is generally the same as that of an initial apprenticeship. Nevertheless, it is possible for an adult apprentice to access advanced training directly (by means of validation of prior working or learning experience).
LV	Validation is an option to obtain qualifications such those achieved through apprenticeships (i.e. professional qualifications at Latvian qualification framework levels 1–4 obtained through validation are the same as those obtained in formal education).

Scheme	Forms of RPL
MT	MCAST applies processes of RPL for parts of its programmes, typically for the theoretical part and not the school-based component.
NL	There is a focus on validating work experiences. In theory, anybody may obtain formal qualifications through validation and be exempted from undertaking formal education.
PL	About 5 % of apprentices are juvenile workers without the status of a student (carrying out the apprenticeship entirely at the employer's premises). They can take exams and reach the same qualifications on the basis of the training received outside the formal school setting (employers need to provide theoretical training).
RO1	Fast-track opportunities may apply. Learners may choose to validate their prior skills or qualifications through validation centres, which are accredited by the same county committees that are responsible for the accreditation of vocational training schemes. Validation centres are operated by accredited training providers.
RO2	Theoretically, if learners engaging in dual VET possess any prior acquired knowledge, skills or qualifications, they may choose to validate these formally through the validation centres operated by certified training providers.

Source: Cedefop.

RPL/validation practices are usually linked with the expansion of a programme to adult learners. Programmes that were initially designed for young learners as part of (upper) secondary education (therefore lasting two to five years) can be shortened for adults by recognising (parts of) their prior learning, through either general or vocational programmes. These arrangements can be either horizontal or based on an individual assessment of learners. In fewer cases, fast-track procedures may be linked with shortening the apprenticeship duration for any learner (e.g. because of exceptional performance).

As another way to ease access to apprenticeship programmes, the analysis included the identification of preparatory courses/programmes that can be offered to learners before they join apprenticeships, either to better inform their choice or to help them cover gaps in terms of skills or knowledge pertinent to prior education levels. References to such preparatory courses were identified in only eight schemes (24 %) (Table 19).

Table 19. **Examples of preparatory courses that ease access to apprenticeship programmes**

Scheme	Preparatory courses
BE-FL	Learners in secondary education who are not yet ready for work-based learning, but are motivated, can enrol in preparatory programmes (<i>aanloopfase</i>) to support their transition to dual learning. These programmes can be entirely school based or can combine school- and work-based learning. They last only as long as needed and are as short as possible.
CY	Preparatory apprenticeships target young people up to 16 years of age who have not completed compulsory lower secondary education. These are a school-based option that gradually introduces students to the labour market, giving them a taste of what VET would be like, helping them to choose a specialisation when they go on to the core apprenticeship. Enrolling in the core apprenticeship is one of two options, the other being completion of secondary education.

Scheme	Preparatory courses
DK	Introduced in 2025, the voluntary junior apprenticeship scheme targets learners in the final two years of lower secondary education who may be struggling with traditional academic pathways but could benefit from practical, hands-on learning. It reduces school hours in favour of workplace training and leads to regular vocational apprenticeship programmes upon successful completion.
FR1	The <i>Prépa apprentissage</i> programmes allow young people to identify their skills and knowledge, develop their relational prerequisites and secure their entry into an apprenticeship contract. They also provide administrative support in recruiting apprentices for the company hosting the young person.
IE	There are several pre-apprenticeship programmes ('access to apprenticeship' programmes) offered by technological universities, and there are some pre-apprenticeship courses in further education and training.
SE	Bridging programmes are intended to ensure that learners are eligible to apply for a national programme at the upper secondary level or are prepared for a vocation.

Source: Cedefop.

Examples of recent relevant national activities

- In **France**, a 2022 circular from the Ministry of Education stipulated that it is possible for the apprenticeship contract duration to take into account the apprentice's skills acquired prior to training. Consequently, apprenticeship contracts leading to the same qualification may have different durations, depending on apprentices' profiles.
- In **Hungary**, the Hungarian Chamber of Commerce and Industry developed a validation procedure in the context of a pilot project in 2022 for those training courses preparing for the 'profession master's examination'. The pilot involved three professions: hairdressers, car mechanics and confectioners.
- In **Lithuania**, the 2022 amendment of the VET Law provided for the evaluation and recognition of competences acquired through formal and non-formal education and self-education. It states that a person seeking to obtain a qualification, or a financing institution responsible for the acquisition of the person's qualification, may apply to vocational training institutions for the evaluation and recognition of competences acquired through non-formal education or self-education related to the desired qualification. The procedure for the evaluation and recognition of these competences is established by the Ministry of Education.

Source: Cedefop.

3.4.3. Apprenticeship qualifications included in the NQFs

Almost all of the apprenticeship schemes lead to qualifications that are listed in the NQFs (an exception is CZ, where the NQF is at an exploratory stage) and are in turn referenced in the EQF. Qualification types vary.

- (a) Apprenticeships can only lead to apprenticeship-specific qualifications in eight schemes (24 % of all schemes analysed). In these cases, apprenticeship programmes are (by regulation or standard practice) the only pathway for learners to reach the qualifications in question. Apprenticeship qualifications are distinct from qualifications that can be reached by other VET pathways.

- (b) Apprenticeships lead to VET-wide qualifications in the majority of schemes (22 of 34, 65 %). In these cases, apprenticeship programmes are one of the alternative options for learners to reach the same qualification (i.e. both apprenticeship programmes and school-based VET lead to the same qualifications).
 - (i) In 10 of these schemes, qualifications make reference to the pathway followed (i.e. that they were acquired through apprenticeships).
 - (ii) In 12 of these schemes, it is not specified if qualifications were achieved via apprenticeships or other (school-based) VET forms.
- (c) In four schemes (BE-FR, LU, PL and SK), both options are available. In these cases, within the same scheme, some programmes lead to apprenticeship-specific qualifications and some lead to VET-wide qualifications. Variation depends on the programme level and/or the provider. For example, in Belgium (French Community), the school-led apprenticeship strand (centres for education and alternating training) leads to formal VET qualifications that may or may not indicate the pathway, while apprenticeships offered by the sectoral training organisations IFAPME and the SME training service can lead to either apprenticeship-specific qualifications or VET qualifications.

Past Cedefop analysis (Cedefop, 2019) has shown that when apprenticeships are an alternative to school-based programmes, leading to the same qualifications, clarity and identity concerns may emerge among national stakeholders and at the implementation level (learners, employers and VET schools). In these cases, additional efforts may be needed to better inform users of the options available and their distinct operating features, the required investment (resources, time) and potential benefits.

The qualification levels that can be reached through apprenticeships are increasingly varying. In only 10 of the 34 schemes (29 %) are apprenticeships located in one qualification level (Table 20 presents their correspondence to the EQF). Within the schemes where apprenticeships are offered at various NQF/EQF levels, not all are equally significant in terms of enrolments and the programmes available. In some schemes, enrolments are concentrated in certain levels, while apprenticeships at other levels are less frequently implemented. For example, in Slovakia, apprenticeships can be organised in programmes at NQF/EQF levels 2, 3, 4 or 5 but, in practice, since their introduction, the majority of apprenticeships have been offered at EQF levels 3 and 4. In Romania, the dual scheme (RO2) is still predominantly offered at EQF level 3.

Another notable observation refers to the increasing presence of apprenticeship programmes at higher qualification levels. Apprenticeships at EQF level 5 or above were identified in at least 15 of the 34 schemes (44 %). At the same time, a few more countries are experimenting with pilots or small-scale

initiatives at these levels; however, these are typically not captured in this analysis, since they are not fully integrated in regulation. A few of these schemes are exclusively or predominantly offered at these levels (EL1, FR1 and IT2).

Table 20. Levels of apprenticeship qualifications (referenced in / corresponding to the EQF)

Scheme	EQF level 2	EQF level 3	EQF level 4	EQF level 5	EQF level 6+
AT			X		
BE-FL	X	X	X		
BE-FR	X	X	X		
BG	X	X	X		
CZ ^(a)		X	X		X
CY		X			
DE		X	X		
DK		X	X	X	
EE	X	X	X	X	
EL1				X	
EL2		X			
ES ^(b)	X	X	X		
FI			X	X	
FR1			X	X	X
FR2			X	X	X
HR			X		
HU			X	X	
IE			X	X	X
IS			X		
IT1		X	X		
IT2				X	X
LT ^(b)	X	X	X	X	
LU	X	X	X		
LV	X	X	X	X	
MT		X	X		X
NL ^(b)	X	X	X		
NO			X		
PL		X			
PT			X	X	
RO1 ^(b)	X	X	X		
RO2		X	X	X	
SE			X		
SI			X		
SK	X	X	X	X	

^(a) In CZ, there is no comprehensive NQF in place.

^(b) In ES, LT, NL and RO1, NQF level 1 is also theoretically possible.

Source: Cedefop.

Examples of recent relevant national activities

- In **Hungary**, since 2023/2024, a new type of programme (the ‘certified technician programme’) has been offered in 97 VET schools in engineering, information and communication technology, and economics; it is jointly developed by *technikums* (offering five-year technological programmes combining general and vocational education), universities and companies offering dual VET, and results in qualifications at EFQ level 5.
- In **Latvia**, following the 2022 amendments to the VET Law, VET institutions (*technikums*) have the right to implement programmes for continuing VET at EQF level 5 and, consequently, also in work-based learning mode.
- In **Portugal**, since 2022, post-secondary apprenticeship+ programmes have been introduced at EQF level 5 for learners between the ages of 18 (minimum) and 29 years (maximum). Exceptions are set out for the maximum age, in the cases of vulnerable groups, beneficiaries covered by labour-market policies and those who are trained to cover specific sectoral needs.

Source: Cedefop.

3.4.4. Progression opportunities

In most cases, apprenticeship graduates can progress to higher levels of education and training, either directly (which might require success in examinations, but without the need to take additional studies) or indirectly (additional studies are required, namely either full programmes or the final year in other programmes or bridge courses). Depending on the level at which apprenticeship schemes (or programmes within a scheme) are placed within the education and training system, opportunities for progression to post-secondary (not-tertiary) or higher education levels are relatively frequent.

- (a) In 11 of the schemes analysed (32 %), direct progression to higher education and training levels (EQF level 5 or EQF level 6+) is possible for all apprenticeship graduates. Success in state or university-specific examinations may be required in several of these schemes, but no additional education is needed.
- (i) In nine of these schemes, progression is possible towards a post-secondary, non-tertiary level (EQF level 5) or a higher education level (EQF level 6 or higher), even if this refers to a subset of all higher education institutions (universities of applied sciences) (e.g. AT, BG, CZ, FI and SE).
 - (ii) Conversely, in two countries, direct progression is possible only for post-secondary education, whereas progression to higher education requires completion of a bridge programme (IS and NO).

- (b) Two schemes are already exclusively positioned at higher education levels (EL1 and IT2), of which the one at EFQ level 5 (EL1) allows progression to EQF level 6 studies.
- (c) In 13 of the schemes analysed (38 %), progression to higher education levels is possible, but only for those graduating from specific programmes within the same scheme (BE-FL, BE-FR, DK, EE, ES, HU, IT1, LT, LV, MT, NL, RO1 and SK). This might be linked to the EQF/ISCED level in which each programme is situated or the type of apprenticeship programme followed. For example, in Denmark, IVET/apprenticeship graduates have to take supplementary courses to enrol in higher education, unless they have followed the vocational education programme resulting in qualification for access to higher education (*Erhvervsfaglig studentereksamen i forbindelse med erhvervsuddannelse*), which includes stronger general subjects and allows direct access to higher education. In other schemes that offer programmes at two different levels (e.g. EFQ level 3 and EQF level 4), only the graduates of the latter may progress to higher education levels.
- (d) In eight schemes (24 %), direct progression to higher education levels at EQF level 5 or above is not possible. Further studies are typically required for such progression to be possible.
 - (i) In most cases, this refers to apprenticeship programmes situated at EQF level 3 (or lower), which require further education, namely enrolment in the (final years) of an EQF level 4 programme (e.g. CY, EL2 and LU for level 2 and 3 programmes, as well as PL and RO2).
 - (ii) In some cases, programmes at EQF level 4 still do not grant access to higher education and training levels unless learners complete one or two additional years in a different programme at the same level (e.g. from an ISCED 353 to an ISCED 354 programme in HR and SI) or if they complete a compulsory preparatory course (e.g. in LU, graduates of technician diplomas at EQF level 4 (ISCED level 354) are still required to take a year-long set of preparatory modules in public training centres before they enrol in higher technician programmes at EQF level 5 or university studies).
 - (iii) In Germany, the EQF level 4 qualification needs to be complemented by three years of relevant work experience before the learner can take a specific admission test that grants access to higher education.

Examples of recent relevant national activities

- In **Greece**, as of the start of the 2021/2022 academic year, up to 5 % of the total first year enrolments in each higher education department are reserved for VET graduates from vocational training institutes and apprenticeship classes (EL1)

who succeed in special admission exams organised by higher education institutions.

- In **Italy**, the concept of a 'single dual apprenticeship cycle' was introduced in 2024, for a smoother progression from apprenticeship type 1 (IT1) to type 3 (IT2 at higher education levels), by allowing the apprenticeship contract to continue through university education and, where applicable, up to doctoral studies or the traineeship required for access to a regulated profession.

Source: Cedefop.

3.4.5. Accumulation of units of learning outcomes

As discussed for criterion 2, elements of the learning outcomes approach were identified in all schemes analysed (although to different extents, as some schemes have only recently introduced the approach). This stands true for both schemes in which qualifications are apprenticeship specific and those that are VET wide (the same qualifications with school-based strands). In this context, the accumulation of units of learning outcomes is generally possible.

This underpins the processes to shorten parts of an apprenticeship programme (see also Section 2.4.2 for RPL/validation practices) and, in general, to render programme delivery more flexible to meet learner needs and to align with their prior background and individual learning trajectories. In some cases, this is followed by specific references to the possibility of learners acquiring partial qualifications (Table 21).

Accumulation of learning outcomes is of particular interest for schemes in which an apprenticeship represents an alternative to school-based VET, to the extent that learners can move from one strand to the other at various points during their studies (e.g. LV, SE and SI).

Table 21. Partial qualifications and other examples of programme flexibility

Scheme	Partial qualifications and other programme flexibility
AT	The integrative (inclusive) IVET scheme sets out two flexible models for people who are at a disadvantage in the labour market: one provides for a prolongation of the apprenticeship by one year (in exceptional cases by up to two years), and the other is the acquisition of a partial qualification whereby only part of an apprenticeship for one occupation or several occupations is taught.
BE-FL	Proof of partial qualification is among the possible qualifications that can be obtained through dual learning. The curriculum files are made up of one or more vocational (or partial) qualifications. Programmes in adult education are modular and therefore vary in duration.
BG	After the 2024 VET Law amendment, the state standards contain information on which set of learning outcomes could lead to a qualification for part of a profession.
CZ	The project 'modernisation of VET' developed qualification modules as partial components of school educational programmes.
DE	In addition to the 'standard' apprenticeship programme duration (3 or 3.5 years), apprenticeships with a duration of 2 years were introduced as a stepping stone for learners who might find a fully fledged training programme too challenging.

Scheme	Partial qualifications and other programme flexibility
FI	The duration of an apprenticeship is based on each student's personal competence development plan, which is designed according to individual needs and objectives. A student's studies may include one or more apprenticeship periods.
IS	The exact time frame for workplace learning is not determined at the outset. Instead, the length of the on-the-job training is determined by how quickly the learner masters a predetermined set of skills. Thus, the focus is on competences gained at the workplace, not the length of time spent there.
MT	For accredited work-based learning, a workload of one credit is assigned based on 100 hours of work-based activity at the place of work. This allocation recognises experiential and applied learning that occurs through professional practice, workplace engagement and reflective activities, which collectively contribute to achieving the intended learning outcomes. This workload represents a 1:4 ratio corresponding to 25 total learning hours per credit for taught units in a classroom environment versus 100 hours per credit for accredited work-based learning at the place of work.
NL	There is focus on increasing partial qualifications and the validation of work experiences. The government initiated the innovation platform MBOin2030 (VET in 2030), which is geared towards providing an infrastructure in VET in which learners can learn anywhere, both formally and informally.
SE	The programmes are modular and organised in courses in which one course is usually 100 credits. The schools decide if a vocational programme should be provided as apprenticeship education and when the apprenticeship starts. The learner chooses between the pathways offered.

Source: Cedefop.

3.4.6. International mobility of apprentices

This section largely draws from [Cedefop's Mobility Scoreboard Database](#), complemented by other sources such as [Cedefop's timeline of VET policies in Europe](#). The analysis shows extensive activity in relation to the overall promotion of international mobility opportunities through Erasmus+ national agencies or other bilateral/cross-regional projects, and the application of the European health card.

Beyond these activities, schemes were analysed in relation to seven different activity areas (the integration of mobility in curricula, specific arrangements for the recognition of learning outcomes developed abroad, the portability of wages/grants, the portability of social protection provisions, partnerships for apprenticeship mobility in particular, regulations regarding incoming mobility and incentives for participating companies). In all schemes analysed, specific arrangements or practices for apprentice mobility are identified in relation to one or more of these activity areas.

- (a) In 68 % of the schemes (23 of 34), either international mobility is integrated in apprenticeship curricula or specific arrangements were identified for the recognition of learning outcomes developed abroad, with a particular focus on the workplace component.
- (b) In 12 schemes (35 %), it was possible to identify arrangements regarding (i) the portability of grants or wages/allowances, (ii) the portability of health and social coverage affordances (apart from the European health card), (iii)

partnerships for apprentice mobility in particular and (iv) regulations regarding incoming mobility.

- (c) The less-addressed activity area is arrangements that offer incentives for companies to support outgoing mobility (explicit references were identified in eight schemes: 24 % of all schemes).

The analysis also examined the extent to which different activity areas associated with apprentice mobility complement each other. A look at the combination of the activities gives a mixed picture.

- (a) Comprehensive arrangements were identified in 26 % of the schemes (9 out of 34). In those cases, the schemes are covered by arrangement regulations related to four or more of the seven possible activity areas. For example, schemes are supported by a combination of provisions regarding the portability of wages/grants, the portability of social protection provisions, partnerships for apprenticeship mobility in particular and incentives for participating companies.
- (b) In 18 schemes (53 %), arrangements to promote apprentice mobility seem to have a narrower scope, that is, activities were identified for only one or two of the possible action categories.

It has to be noted that an update of [Cedefop's Mobility Scoreboard Database](#) is under way at the time of writing of this report (2026). Further analysis of updated information will allow a clearer understanding of the extent to which apprenticeship schemes are underpinned by an extensive or narrower set of provisions regarding international apprentice mobility.

Examples of recent relevant national activities

- In **Austria**, the apprenticeship without borders initiative was launched in December 2022 with the goal of doubling the mobility stays of apprentices by 2027. The core of the initiative is an information campaign aimed at providing both apprentices and training companies / VET schools with details about the possibilities and advantages of a stay abroad and the support available.
- In **Belgium (French Community)**, as of 2022–2023, it is possible for apprentices from abroad to also have mobility periods of workplace training in Flanders, with an agreement being drawn up with the training provider abroad and the workplace in Flanders.
- In **Finland**, a new optional module of the qualification 'working in international tasks' has entered into force and it is placed in the common modules of the qualification in VET. This new optional qualification unit, which is available in all upper secondary level vocational qualifications, allows VET students to gain work experience in international environments. The new unit provides opportunities,

especially to those students whose fields have not traditionally had international mobility as a part of their training.

- **France** and **Germany** signed a bilateral agreement in 2023 to introduce cross-border apprenticeships; its integration into their national legislations was further advanced in 2024.
- In **Germany**, the Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training published, in 2022, a competence module with specific examples of formulations to help integrate 'international professional competences' in German training regulations. The tool was developed at the national level on behalf of the Federal Ministry of Education and Research with experts, social partners and government representatives.
- In **Spain**, the 2022 Organic VET Law includes among its general principles the promotion of internationalisation and transnational mobility. It sets as one objective the promotion of mobility projects and the extension of the knowledge of foreign languages.

Source: Cedefop.

3.5. Criterion 12: career guidance and awareness raising

EFQEA criterion 12

Career guidance and awareness raising. Career guidance, mentoring and learner support should be provided before and during the apprenticeship to ensure successful outcomes, to prevent and reduce dropouts and to support those learners to re-engage with relevant education and training pathways. Apprenticeships should be promoted as an attractive learning pathway through widely targeted awareness-raising activities.

Source: EFQEA.

To enable Europe to ride the waves of change, it is critical for all individuals to acquire and update their skills and competences, to manage their careers and to meet their needs in learning, work and life. Lifelong guidance is realised through provisions to enable all individuals across their lifespan to identify their capacities, competences and interests and to make career decisions that are meaningful for them along their life paths (including before, during and after VET). The report [An EU Reference Framework for Lifelong Guidance](#) (Cedefop, 2026) sets out a shared vision and 18 practical guidelines for developing high-quality and accessible lifelong guidance systems and services that are designed to work for people and promote learning and career development. In this context, guidance is part of existing policies, measures and systems in education, training and the labour market and in the youth and social fields.

In this context, for the current analysis, criterion 12 is examined through three complementary indicators, examining the presence of:

- (a) systemic and regular activities intended to increase the awareness of apprenticeship offers among prospective learners and their families, either through services at prior educational levels or through generic campaigns and online campaigns;
- (b) guidance services reaching apprentices in a targeted or systematic way (note that guidance by in-company trainers or other company staff is not included in this section);
- (c) relatively structured and regularly offered initiatives that support apprentices in particular, in their capacity as learners in VET schools, to overcome learning difficulties, address personal challenges and eventually complete apprenticeships despite adversities.

3.5.1. Awareness raising and guidance before joining apprenticeships

Beyond online platforms that offer information on sectors, occupations, skill needs and available training/apprenticeship offers (see criterion 13), other recurrent, systematic activities to raise awareness on apprenticeships among learners and their families were identified in at least 22 of the 34 schemes analysed (65 %). These usually relate to campaigns to promote apprenticeships in general or to address specific learner groups (e.g. female apprentices) or specific sectors.

Only a few cases of tasters were identified, sometimes linked to learner support so that prospective apprentices can learn about professions while covering learning gaps. In Belgium (Flemish Community), learners in secondary education who are interested in joining an apprenticeship but are not deemed ready can enrol in flexible, short-term preparatory programmes (*aanloopfase*) that can include time at the workplace (organised by schools). In Germany, school career orientation staff and the local PES vocational guidance services cooperate closely; for example, visits to the local employment agency and to enterprises are organised and compulsory one- to three-week work placements take place in companies in grades 8, 9 or 10. In Denmark, municipal youth guidance units promote taster courses, among other guidance activities, to help learners in lower secondary education better prepare their personal plan for further education and training.

It has to be noted that this quality indicator includes actions that take place at the implementation level (not those strictly set out in regulations) and may be carried out by a number of actors. Therefore, some initiatives may not have been covered by the present exercise.

Examples of recent relevant national activities

- In **Germany**, the Federal Ministry for Education, Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth launched, in February 2026, its flagship initiative for strong vocational training that attracts and trains skilled workers. The initiative has two key guiding principles: (a) bringing together businesses and apprentices and (b)

promoting vocational training as driver for a skilled labour force and opportunities. The initiative bundles single projects.

- In **Ireland**, a targeted campaign to promote apprenticeship opportunities among girls and women called 'Facts, Faces, Futures' was launched in 2023. Over 100 of the all-girls schools around the country received apprenticeship information and briefings as part of the campaign. In May 2026, the National Apprenticeship Office launched the national 'Women Shaking Up the Future' campaign. The Apprentice of the Year awards have taken place since 2022.
- In **Lithuania**, the 'publicity of apprenticeships in Lithuania' project promotes apprenticeships, aiming to increase their attractiveness. In addition, the national promotion event 'Apprentice of the Year' started in 2022. This includes video promotions and articles in local media to promote apprenticeships among young people.
- In **the Netherlands**, the initiative BBL-offensive (launched in 2023) intends to increase apprenticeship participation from 30 % to 35 % of all VET students. It consists of five action lines, including raising awareness of the dual pathway and improving guidance and support for apprentices, particularly in sectors experiencing labour shortages, where limited time for workplace supervision can hinder learning.
- In **Slovakia**, in 2022, the State Vocational Education Institute (ŠIOV) created a network of contact centres in each of the eight autonomous regions to promote learning opportunities within the dual education system and two regional talent centres that provide pupils with more specialised career services (e.g. mapping of competences and skills, career exploration activities and a presentation on labour-market trends and employment outlook).

Source: Cedefop.

3.5.2. Access to guidance during apprenticeships

The analysis focused on guidance services that reach apprentices as part of their **school-based component**. The guidance and mentoring offered at the workplace by in-company trainers, mentors or other company staff was not considered for this quality indicator.

In this context, services or structures that may offer guidance to apprentices during their studies were identified in all schemes analysed.

- (a) In 16 of the 34 schemes (47 %), services or structures are apprenticeship specific. These usually refer to:
- (i) PES structures that extend their activities to VET/apprenticeship schools (e.g. youth agencies run by the PES with collaboration from federal ministries and local actors (DE));
 - (ii) career counselling services operating under the ministry of education that also have a mandate in relation to apprentices (e.g. information and guidance centres (FR));
 - (iii) in-house school guidance services, such as the career offices at PES apprenticeship schools (EL2), each covering apprentices in one or more schools;

- (iv) regional guidance centres (e.g. regional centres on education and work (Leerwerkloketten; NL));
 - (v) support offered by dedicated school staff (e.g. 'trajectory counsellors' (BE-FL), 'pedagogically responsible' people (PT) and practical training coordinators (SI)).
- (b) In 18 of the 34 schemes (53 %), services or structures are common to those available to all secondary education and training / VET learners (in the case of young people) or to PES services offered to all adults (especially in the case of apprenticeship programmes offered to adult learners). When such services are offered at the school level, they are more likely to reach apprentices in those schemes in which apprenticeship is an alternative form of VET organisation for the same programmes/qualifications and all learners attend the same education units (e.g. BG, CZ, EE, IS, LT, LV, SE and SK).

The analysis gives a picture that reaffirms several considerations that apply to guidance services for VET, such as the multitude of actors involved, not only from a cross-country analytical point of view, both also within schemes. Guidance services and practices that can reach apprentices are run by school offices, ministry of education services, PESs, county/municipality bodies, employer associations and, in fewer cases, trade unions, VET provider networks and apprentice/learner associations. Moreover, the implementation level varies: from nationwide online tools for all education or all VET to local- and school-level services.

Another consideration that requires further exploration is the profile of people assigned to offer guidance-related services to apprentices. Particularly when these services are mainly offered at the school level, the profile of professionals may differ: in some schemes, schoolteachers assume additional learner guidance duties (with concerns about the presence or lack of relevant qualifications or training) and, in other cases, specialised, qualified guidance staff are employed at the school level. In the former case, there are additional concerns about the capacity of teachers to combine guidance tasks for all learners with teaching hours and the extent to which teachers may be informed of labour-market intelligence, etc.

Examples of recent relevant national activities

- In **Italy**, as of the 2023/2024 school year, upper secondary schools are putting in place educational guidance modules for students of at least 30 hours' duration per school year.
- In **Slovakia**, the Act on Adult Education (292/2024) introduced the possibility of covering the costs of career guidance and counselling of people aged 16+ by means of individual learning accounts.
- In **Spain**, the 2022 VET Law emphasises guidance and customised support and advice for learners. The law stipulates that public authorities are to guarantee comprehensive support for educational and professional career development through effective and appropriate career guidance. In level D programmes at basic and intermediate levels, career guidance shall also include socio-educational support elements.

Source: Cedefop.

3.5.3. Access to learner support during apprenticeships

The multitude of supporting figures who can support apprentices (teachers, other school staff and in-company trainers) is often cited as an enabling factor of apprenticeships in relation to the participation of learners and the completion of programmes. This includes for those who come from disadvantaged backgrounds and/or are at risk of dropping out.

Apart from case-by-case support that may be generally available, the analysis intends to discuss the extent to which learner support (psychological support or support to overcome learning difficulties and complete the programme) through dedicated services or structured, established practices can be identified in apprenticeship schemes.

- (a) In 24 of the 34 schemes analysed (71 %), specific learner support services or established practices were identified (e.g. 'apprenticeship coaching' (AT), 'life counsellors' (EL) and 'care-advice teams' (NL)).
- (b) In the remaining schemes, it was not clear if learner support was offered in the context of overall guidance services or not at all in a structured way, through dedicated staff/services.

One more aspect of learner support may be offering learning conditions that are suitable for certain learner categories. Such arrangements were rarely reported, such as arrangements for part-time attendance (DE) or e-learning options (FI), which may be of particular interest for adults who have family obligations but wish to (re-)engage in apprenticeship programmes. In Italy (IT1), the duration of apprenticeship programmes may be extended by up to one additional year for candidates who fail to pass the final examination. In Austria, prolongation of the apprenticeship by one year is possible as a means to increase the inclusion of learners from disadvantaged groups. In addition, parents with childcare responsibilities and individuals with health restrictions may reduce their

daily or weekly training time by up to half, with a corresponding extension of the total training duration by up to two years.

As in the case of guidance (see Section 3.5.2), it was not always explicitly identified if the learner support services were offered by qualified and experienced staff (e.g. psychologists or social workers) (Table 22) or by regular teaching staff, who may lack training and expertise.

Table 22. Examples of learner support by specialised staff

Scheme	Specialised learner support
CZ	Each school employs a school methodologist specialised in the prevention of socio-pathological disorders, and there may also be a school psychologist and a special pedagogue depending on the size of the school and available funding.
FR1	Comprehensive career guidance services are provided at school, with the aim being to provide support for all students, address those at risk and diminish school dropout. Some of the roles involved include psychologists, guidance counsellors and directors of information and guidance centres. Psychologists, guidance counsellors and directors of information and guidance centres help learners and provide technical advice to the educational team.
HR	Team evaluation is carried out for learners who might face labour-market problems after they complete their education (i.e. those with developmental and health issues, learning disabilities or behaviour disorders), including psychological assessment, an interview and, if needed, a medical examination by an occupational health physician.
LU	The Psycho-social and Educational Accompaniment Centre (CePAS) helps learners in school or through career guidance and may provide psychological support.
NL	'Care-advice teams' are established in schools to provide access to career guidance and preventive measures for at-risk students with behavioural difficulties. They include representatives from schools, health services, psychologists and the police.

Source: Cedefop.

Examples of recent relevant national activities

- In **Austria**, the training supervisors' model (piloted since 2020) has been extended in recent years to provide coaching and guidance to apprentices and companies to prevent early dropouts. Supervisors act as mediators, maintaining regular contact with all stakeholders to identify and resolve vocational or personal problems, such as learning difficulties or health issues.
- In **Denmark**, the 2025 prepared for the future VII initiative includes 31 actions designed to deliver a quality boost to VET and enhance its attractiveness, including reducing dropout rates, improving the social and learning environments and making access to VET programmes more flexible.
- In **Greece** (EL1), a 2025 circular introduced specific support measures targeting apprentices with disabilities or special educational needs, also providing guidance on related support measures and implementation arrangements.

Source: Cedefop.

3.6. Criterion 13: transparency

EFQEA criterion 13

Transparency. The transparency of, and access to, apprenticeship offers within and between Member States should be ensured, including with the support of public and private employment services, as well as other relevant bodies and, when appropriate, by using EU tools such as European Employment Services (EURES) as provided for in the EURES Regulation.

Source: EFQEA.

The analysis of this criterion is focused on the transparency of, and access to, apprenticeship offers within Member States. Since much of the activity in this area relates to the implementation (and not the regulatory) level, an effort was made to consider only those initiatives that seem to be well established, broad in terms of coverage and supported by key actors, such as employer associations, chambers, ministries, PESs or national apprenticeship coordinating bodies. The analysis examines if:

- (a) information on apprenticeships primarily relevant to learners and their families (e.g. available programmes, providers, training companies and participation rules) is publicly available, through online platforms (in addition to campaigns or other similar activities examined under criterion 12);
- (b) the apprenticeship placements offered by training companies are made available publicly and/or in centralised platforms that allow learners and/or schools and chambers to browse available information and make better-informed decisions regarding apprentice–company match.

3.6.1. Information on apprenticeships being publicly available

In 21 of the 34 schemes analysed (62 %), relevant platforms/tools were identified for making information publicly available for learners and/or their families on apprenticeship offers (programmes, VET providers and training companies) and the procedures/requirements to join a programme.

- (a) Frequently (in 18 schemes), such information refers to apprenticeship occupations and programmes or overall information on trades/occupations (see also criterion 12 on awareness raising). For example, in Belgium (Flemish Community), an [online search tool](#) helps learners find a dual programme and school, while, in Denmark, the tool ‘zooming in on education’ (UddannelsesZOOM) allows one to compare information about different programmes according to various parameters. In Spain, [todofp.es](#) is the main platform that offers information on training offers, the labour market, skills competitions, etc. Similar information may be available on the websites of

- PESs (including in EL2 and PT, where the PES is also a key apprenticeship provider, but also in other schemes such as the role of ADEM, the PES in LU) or on the websites of key providers, such as MCAST in Malta.
- (b) In many of the schemes, such information also includes requirements and procedures to join an apprenticeship scheme. For example, Studyinfo (Opintopolku.fi) is Finland's national online service for education and training information, guidance, applications and admissions, run by the Finnish National Agency for Education.

Given that this criterion is linked to the implementation level and not the regulatory framework, some national-level initiatives or platforms to make information publicly available may not have been identified in the current exercise. It is also unclear to what extent the instruments identified reach their intended audiences, but such an assessment is outside the scope of the present analysis. Nevertheless, the cross-country analysis shows that there is room to improve transparency within Member States. It is likely that, in practice, in about one third of the schemes, the promotion of placements (and subsequent matching) happens predominantly at the school level through less formalised channels, which increases the workload of school staff and might provide learners and their families with a limited picture of all the available apprenticeship options.

Examples of recent relevant national activities

- In **Luxembourg**, the Chamber of Employees (*Chambre des salariés*) runs the campaign 'Apprenticeship 2022 – Start at full speed'. The campaign aims to promote and improve the attractiveness of apprenticeships. The campaigns' web page presents comprehensive information on opportunities for apprenticeships in different fields.
- In **Poland**, as of 2025, a web platform (Integrated Education Platform (*Infozawodowe*)) exists to inform learners about different education and training options, but also to provide information on labour-market needs and professions and to host posts from training companies. It includes information on VET/apprenticeships.

Source: Cedefop.

3.6.2. Apprenticeship placements being publicly available

In 20 of the 34 schemes (59 %; see also Section 2.3.2), online platforms and/or centralised registries exist for companies to post their available apprenticeship placements. In 18 of these (53 % of all schemes), it was clearly identified that learners can access publicly available information by accessing open general job portals or apprenticeship-specific platforms. Among those, the following schemes exclusively target apprenticeship placements or have distinct sections for such posts:

- (a) Austria (lehrbetriebsuebersicht.wko.at);
- (b) Belgium (Flemish Community) (<https://werkplekken.werkplekduaal.be>);
- (c) Belgium (French Community) ([Stageplus](#) by the Office francophone de la Formation en alternance (OFFA));
- (d) Finland ([Oppisopumus](#) by the Association of Apprenticeship Organisers);
- (e) France (FR1 and FR2) ([1jeune1solution](#));
- (f) Germany (various tools);
- (g) Ireland (<https://apprenticeship.ie/>);
- (h) Lithuania (<https://www.pameistryste.lt/>);
- (i) the Netherlands (<https://leerbanenmarkt.nl/> by Foundation for Cooperation on Vocational Education, Training and the Labour Market (SBB));
- (j) Poland (<https://infozawodowe.men.gov.pl/>);
- (k) Portugal ([IEFP platform](#) by the Instituto de Emprego e Formação Profissional (IEFP));
- (l) Slovenia (<https://crum.cpi.si>);
- (m) Sweden (various tools at the regional level).

In Denmark, Latvia and Slovakia, only broader job sites that include apprenticeship placements were reported.

For two more schemes (BG and EL1), the platforms are of restricted access, usually granted to schools or centralised ministry services that coordinate apprenticeship matching. In this case, they identify a suitable apprenticeship opportunity and proceed with matching with or without the involvement of the learner and/or the training company.

It is not always clear how comprehensive these platforms are (i.e. if they include all, most or some of the available apprenticeship placements). For example, the Austrian Economic Chamber (WKO) runs a platform on which learners can find more than 55 000 training companies. The French platform 1jeune1solution, run by the Ministry of Labour, gives access to [350 000 apprenticeship opportunities](#). Other platforms may capture only one segment of all available apprenticeship slots.

In a few schemes, more than one of these platforms exist: different sectors, regions or schools / training centres may keep their own registries and platforms. This may reduce the effectiveness of each tool and limit the transparency regarding the total apprenticeship offers within the regional or national context.

The [EURES portal](#) represents a complementary source for available (cross-border) apprenticeship slots.

Regardless of the comprehensiveness of such tools, in 14 of the schemes analysed (41 %), no tool was identified to allow companies to post their available slots or to allow learners (and schools) to browse available offers. Beyond transparency issues, this share also suggests that, for these schemes, providing

significant resources for screening and matching apprentices with companies fall on the shoulders of VET schools or similar services, which are tasked accordingly.

Example of recent relevant national activities

In **Malta**, since April 2023, the apprenticeship vacancy submission by employers has been much simplified by the launch of a new website that displays apprenticeship vacancies that are directly uploaded by employers. The website is accessible to all prospective apprentices, who can apply for an apprenticeship vacancy directly with employers.

Source: Cedefop.

3.7. Criterion 14: quality assurance and tracking of apprentices

EFQEA criterion 14

Quality assurance and tracking of apprentices. Quality assurance approaches should be in place that take into account the Eqavet, including a process allowing a valid and reliable assessment of the learning outcomes. The tracking of apprentices' employment and career progression should be pursued, in accordance with national and European legislation on data protection.

Source: EFQEA.

The Eqavet, established by a [2009 European Parliament and Council recommendation](#), supports quality assurance in VET across Europe. A [2022 survey](#) conducted by the Eqavet national reference points showed that 23 Member States had in place national approaches that covered IVET and associated work-based learning, and 15 Member States had similar approaches for continuing VET and associated work-based learning. To better understand the coverage of such approaches, criterion 14 was broken down into three indicators exploring the following areas.

- (a) Are there quality assurance approaches that are either apprenticeship specific or VET wide with strong evidence that they include apprenticeships? Within this indicator, the depth of coverage was considered: are there basic quality indicators related to input and output (e.g. enrolments and graduations) or are there clear provisions, regulations and well-established practices that cover, in depth, the quality of the learning provided across the programme duration, not only at school but also at the workplace?

- (b) Are there processes that allow a valid and reliable (end) assessment of learning outcomes to be undertaken, again paying attention to both the school (VET providers) and workplace components?
- (c) Are there graduate-tracking mechanisms with a particular focus on the inclusion of apprenticeship graduates?
- (d) How is the feedback loop closed, that is, are there cost–benefit analyses or stakeholder satisfaction surveys, and does this help to document the value produced by apprenticeships to the scheme’s various stakeholders and bring to the surface strengths and gaps related to its ability to meet the stated policy objectives?

3.7.1. Comprehensive quality assurance mechanisms for apprenticeships

In all schemes analysed, quality assurance approaches (with or without direct references to overall Eqavet implementation) were identified, covering at least the monitoring of inputs and outputs (e.g. enrolments, graduations and dropouts). Specific requirements/provisions for data collection on such key indicators are reported in almost all of the apprenticeship schemes.

In most cases, it was possible to identify that the responsibilities for such overall monitoring and quality assurance clearly lie with specific bodies, such as national VET institutions or chambers. There were ample references to the combination of self-evaluation and external evaluation processes, as far as the school-based component of apprenticeships is concerned.

When it comes to monitoring the quality of learning provided – including its workplace component – the analysis is not always conclusive on the extent to which these processes capture the quality of learning during the workplace component or if the processes are only/primarily focused on the school-based part of apprenticeship programmes. Some examples of apprenticeship-specific arrangements include:

- (a) apprenticeship-specific quality assurance mechanisms, for example the quality management of the apprenticeships system (AT), the *Qualiopi* quality assurance framework (FR), requirements for training companies to follow centrally set quality assurance processes (HU) and the overarching work placement protocol setting quality requirements for employers (NL);
- (b) clear mandates for collective bodies, chambers or the ministry of education to monitor the quality of the workplace component, for example the Flemish partnership for dual learning, technical and VET inspectors in Cyprus, statutory ‘authorised officers’ in Ireland and the Swedish school inspectorate;
- (c) provider-level structures or requirements, for example the staff of IFAPME appointed to check the quality of workplace learning (BE-FR) and new requirements for regular MCAST staff visits to the workplace (MT);

- (d) the development of quality standards by employer associations, for example in Czechia, where groups of training companies create the workplace quality standards that need to be discussed with the Ministry of Employment, and, similarly, in Ireland, in the case of business-led apprenticeships.

Examples of recent relevant national activities

- In **Belgium (French Community)**, since 2022, the main apprenticeship providers (centres for dual vocational education and training, IFAPME and the SMEs training service) have been collaborating with the national quality assurance reference point to harmonise their quality standards. This work focuses primarily on aligning their work–study training programmes with the actual needs of the labour market. Quality assurance indicators have been developed to this end.
- In **Bulgaria**, a new ordinance for quality assurance in VET training centres and VET colleges was issued by the Minister for Education and Science in 2025.
- In **Czechia**, the Czech School Inspectorate has assumed the mandate to inspect not only schools but also company workplaces providing dual practical training, checking compliance with educational and safety requirements. The inspectorate monitors if there is the right consistency between the national curriculum and the school curriculum, and at the workplace it monitors issues related to, for example, the proportion of learners to instructors (6:1) and if the instructor is accredited. The school–company agreement that defines the training content to be delivered to students is the reference for such monitoring.
- In **France**, as of 1 January 2022, all apprenticeship training centres must possess a national quality certification (*Qualiopi*). A quality label for vocational training (Eduform), which includes commitments to the lifelong development of staff qualifications and skills, can be obtained, through which the *Qualiopi* certification is automatically issued.

Source: Cedefop.

3.7.2. Processes allowing a valid and reliable assessment of learning outcomes

Output evaluation processes related to the reliable final assessment and/or examination of apprenticeships were clearly identified in almost all schemes (at least in 32 of 34: 94 %). Such processes usually relate to:

- (a) written final exams that correspond to the qualification in question, organised in a centralised manner (either nationwide exams or exams organised by chambers or craft associations or other designated examination organisers, for example the Regional Examination Boards in PL);
- (b) practical demonstrations in front of assessment panels that typically involve representatives of employers and/or trade unions;
- (c) other practices or tools that may support assessment processes:
 - (i) in Ireland, the role of ‘assessor’ is envisaged for the workplace component, namely an experienced person who is qualified in the occupation, with responsibility for conducting on-the-job assessments;

the assessor may or may not be the in-company trainer (mentor) and, for some occupations, an external assessor may be assigned by the coordinating provider of the apprenticeship programme;

- (ii) in Italy, evidence of the development of learning over the apprenticeship's duration is documented in individual apprentice dossiers, which are based on a nationally standardised tool;
- (iii) in Iceland, the digital logbook has become an established instrument for monitoring, documenting and assuring the quality of work-based learning;
- (iv) in Malta, students following an apprenticeship at MCAST are requested to fill in a vocational competence logbook that needs to be verified by the employer;
- (v) in Sweden, a digital tool to track/secure learning at the workplace is in place.

More often than not, national assessment standards that apply to apprenticeship programmes were reported, which are either common for all VET or, more rarely, apprenticeship specific, linked to apprenticeship qualifications. Such standardised requirements can either be included in the qualification profiles or VET standards or be stand-alone, dedicated documents (e.g. examination standards for journeyman exams in craft apprenticeships (PL)).

3.7.3. Graduate-tracking mechanisms

Graduate-tracking mechanisms were identified in 20 of the 34 schemes (59 %). These are usually carried out for all education and training / VET graduates, not apprenticeship graduates specifically. Examples of apprenticeship-specific graduate-tracking procedures are rare (e.g. in BE-FR, IFAPME, which is a key apprenticeship provider, carries out a graduate-tracking exercise for graduates of the programmes under its supervision). For three schemes, it was reported that graduate-tracking systems are under development or moving from a pilot to a consolidated/expanded stage.

3.7.4. Cost–benefit analyses or stakeholder satisfaction surveys

Other evaluations related to cost–benefit analyses or stakeholder satisfaction surveys (of employers and learners) are rarely reported (in eight schemes, 24 %), and typically they are not carried out on a regular basis. Examples of regular analyses include the following.

- (a) In Austria, every two years, the Federal Ministry of Labour and Economy submits a report that, as well as providing a comprehensive statistical analysis, also examines the impact of dual learning and offers recommendations for further developments.

- (b) In Germany, the Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BiBB) has surveyed apprenticeship companies since the early 1980s regarding the costs and benefits deriving from their participation in training. Seven surveys have been published, with increased frequency since 2007 (every five years).
- (c) In Ireland, reviews of the apprenticeship system take place ahead of the development of multiannual action plans for apprenticeships. A review is under way to inform the forthcoming 2026–2030 action plan.
- (d) In Finland, a student feedback survey is sent twice a year to apprentices during their studies, a survey is sent to in-company trainers at the end of the on-the-job learning period and a survey is sent to workplaces twice a year to the person responsible for the cooperation between the company and the VET providers.

Examples of recent relevant national activities

- In **France**, in 2024, apprenticeships were subject to increased oversight, which aimed to limit expenditure and ensure the economic sustainability of the system, while preserving the democratisation drive pursued by the legislature through the 2018 act and by the public authorities. To this end, several analyses were made available, including the report on the use of funds by France Compétences and a dedicated annex to the Vocational Training Budget Act.
- In **Ireland**, a process was launched in 2026 for the economic assessment of the mechanisms currently employed by the state to incentivise participation in national apprenticeship programmes, targeting both employers and prospective apprentices.
- In **Norway**, the National Centre for Vocational Education was established in 2025 to strengthen knowledge of and research on VET. The centre will focus on monitoring, evaluation, research and long-term strategic knowledge development. More regular reporting is expected in the future. The centre is expected to support the system by (a) producing and collecting research, analyses and evaluations, (b) contributing to evidence-informed policy discussions and (c) strengthening the overall knowledge base available to authorities and social partners.
- In **Slovenia**, between 2023 and 2025, the apprenticeship system was evaluated as part of the broader VET ecosystem. The evaluation focused on the capacities of social partners and employers, the functioning of interdepartmental cooperation, the role of chambers and trade unions, curriculum flexibility and the organisation of work-based learning.

Source: Cedefop.

Abbreviations

Cedefop	European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training
CPD	continuing professional development
EFQEA	European framework for quality and effective apprenticeships
Eqavet	European quality assurance reference framework for vocational education and training
EQF	European qualifications framework
EU-27+	EU Member States, Iceland and Norway
EURES	European Employment Services
IFAPME	<i>Institut wallon de Formation en Alternance et des indépendants et Petites et Moyennes Entreprises</i> (Wallon Institute for Dual Training and for Self-employed Workers and Small and Medium-sized Enterprises)
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education
IVET	initial vocational education and training
MCAST	Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology
NQF	national qualifications framework
PES	public employment service
RPL	recognition of prior learning
SMEs	small and medium-sized enterprises
STEM	science, technology, engineering and mathematics
VET	vocational education and training

References

URLs accessed 15.07.2026

- Cedefop. (2019). *Apprenticeship schemes in European countries: a cross-nation overview*. Publications Office of the European Union.
<https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2801/722857>
- Cedefop. (2021). *EFQEA implementation: a Cedefop analysis and main findings: how schemes in Cedefop's European database on apprenticeship schemes compare with EFQEA criteria*. Publications Office of the European Union.
<http://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2801/563247>
- Cedefop. (2025). *Apprenticeships: incentives for employers and learners*. Publications Office of the European Union. Cedefop reference series, 127.
<https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications/3097>
- Cedefop. (2026). *An EU reference framework for lifelong guidance: 18 guidelines for policy and systems development*. Cedefop reference series, 125. Publications Office of the European Union.
<http://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2801/8255414>
- European Commission. (2021). *Putting into practice the European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships: implementation of the Council Recommendation by Member States*. Commission staff working document. SWD(2021)230. [https://ec.europa.eu/transparency/documents-register/detail?ref=SWD\(2021\)230](https://ec.europa.eu/transparency/documents-register/detail?ref=SWD(2021)230)
- European Commission. Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture. (2024). *Education and training monitor 2024: comparative report*. Publications Office of the European Union.
<https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/815875>
- European Commission. Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture. (2025). *Education and training monitor 2025: comparative report*. Publications Office of the European Union.
<https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/2221794>

Cedefop online tools and project pages

- Cedefop European database on apprenticeship schemes.
<https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/apprenticeship-schemes>
- Database on financing apprenticeships in the EU.
<https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/financing-apprenticeships>
- European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning.
<https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/country-reports/european-inventory-on-validation>
- Inventory of lifelong guidance systems and practices.
<https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/country-reports/inventory-lifelong-guidance-systems-and-practices>

Learning outcomes (theme page).

<https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/themes/learning-outcomes>

Mobility Scoreboard Database. <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/mobility-scoreboard>

Teachers and trainers in a changing world.

<https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/country-reports/teachers-and-trainers-in-a-changing-world>

Timeline of VET policies in Europe.

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

VET in Europe database – detailed VET system descriptions.

<https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/vet-in-europe/systems/france-u3>

Other online tools and project pages

Eurydice. <https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/>

Quality of apprenticeships in Europe

Cedefop comparative analysis of apprenticeship schemes based on the European framework for quality and effective apprenticeships

Five years after the previous comparative analysis by the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop) on the implementation of the European framework for quality and effective apprenticeships (EFQEA), and ahead of the forthcoming European strategy for vocational education and training, this publication sets out the findings of and reflections on the comparative analysis of quality in apprenticeships across 34 schemes from the 27 EU Member States, Iceland and Norway.

The analysis identifies areas of strength and progress, but also areas in which gaps were identified across the countries and schemes studied. By revealing patterns in how the quality of apprenticeships is considered within each EFQEA criterion, but also how these are interconnected, this publication offers reflections for further improvements and insights into the future course of action.



CEDEFOP

European Centre for the Development
of Vocational Training

Europe 123, Thessaloniki (Pylaia), GREECE
Postal: Cedefop service post, 570 01 Thermi, GREECE
Tel. +30 2310490111, Fax +30 2310490020
Email: info@cedefop.europa.eu

www.cedefop.europa.eu



**Publications Office
of the European Union**

Law | Data | Publications