



CEDEFOP

European Centre for the Development
of Vocational Training

Quality of apprenticeships in the EU:

**Cedefop analysis in relation to the Council
Recommendation on European Framework
for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships**



An ongoing process...



**Economic crisis
→ turn to
apprenticeship as
a way to improve
labour market
transitions for
young people**

**New
apprenticeship
schemes, or
modernisation of
older ones
+
New models to
organise
apprenticeship**

**Expansion to more
sectors, more
levels,
apprenticeship for
adults gaining
ground
(incl. up/reskilling
for the twin
transition)**

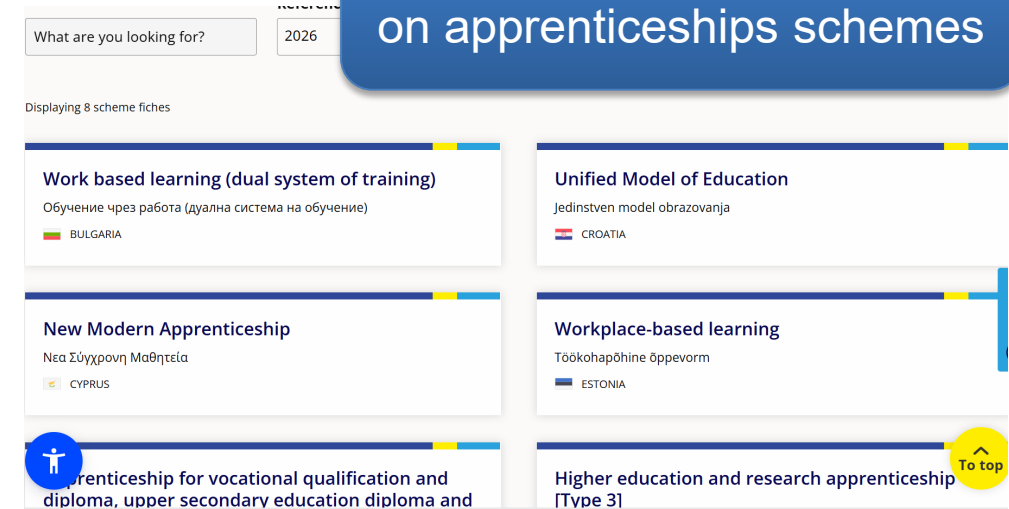
**Different
understandings of
what constitutes an
apprenticeship →
2018
Recommendation on
the EFQEA →
'understanding' +
quality criteria**

**MS worked on
improving
quality,
2021 DG EMPL
monitoring
report,
2021 Cedefop
analysis**

2026 Cedefop cross-country analysis

- To identify areas of strength, persisting challenges and patterns across Europe
- 14 EFQEA Criteria → Cedefop indicators
- Sources
 - [Cedefop European Database on apprenticeship schemes/ Cedefop Community of apprenticeship experts](#)
 - Other Cedefop activities (Guidance, Validation, mobility, VET in Europe, teachers and trainers)

Cedefop European database on apprenticeships schemes



Past similar analysis (2021)

www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications/4195

New analysis (2026)

www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications/5626

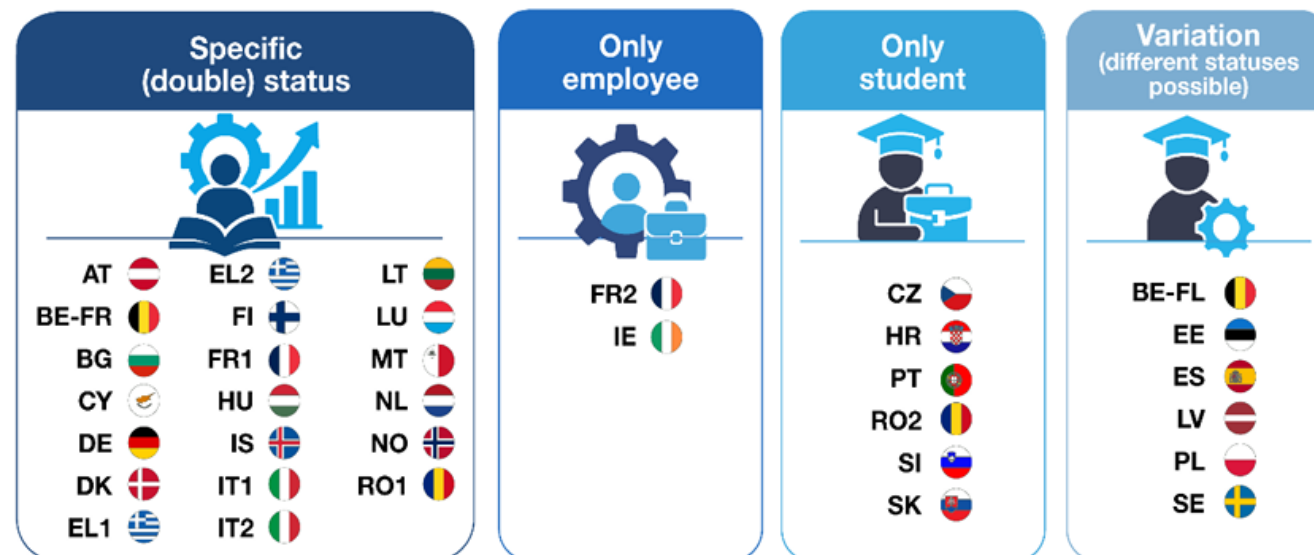
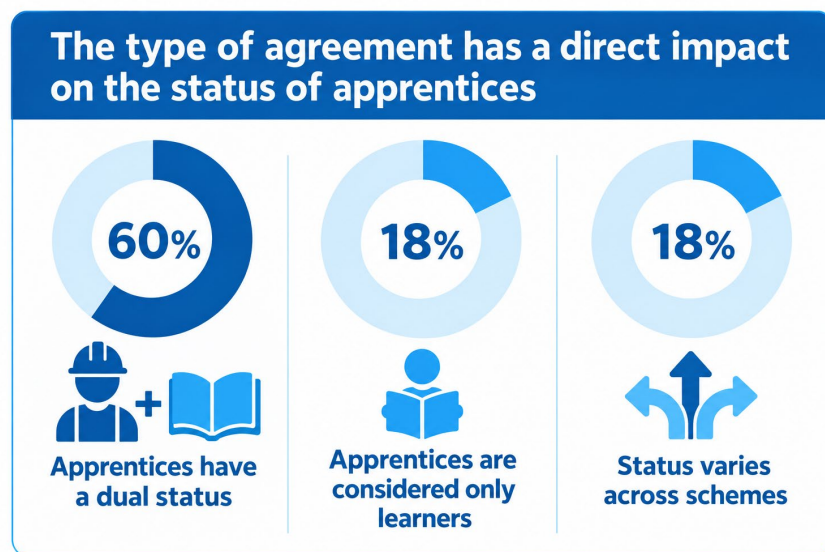
**EFQEA IMPLEMENTATION:
A CEDEFOP ANALYSIS
AND MAIN FINDINGS**
How schemes in Cedefop's European database on
apprenticeship schemes compare with EFQEA criteria

Learning and working conditions: EFQEA criteria 1-7



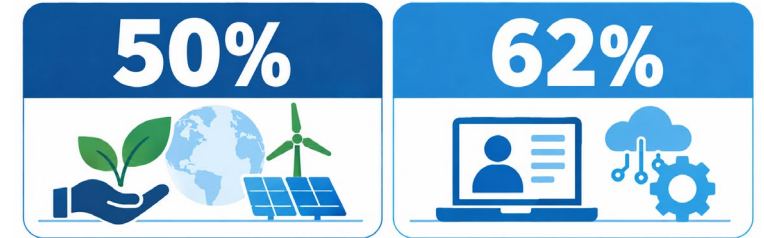
Criterion 1: Written agreement

- **A written agreement exists in all countries**
 - In 65% of the schemes: signed by the learner and the employer
 - In 26% of the schemes: the VET provider is also a third signatory party
- **The type of written agreement varies**
 - In 85% of the schemes, the agreement can be a specific type of contract (apprenticeship contract) covered by labour code/regulations, or a regular employment contract
 - But, in 1/3 of the schemes, it can take also/only the form of an agreement outside labour regulations
 - In most cases when both options coexist, the employer decides what type to use



Criterion 2: Learning outcomes

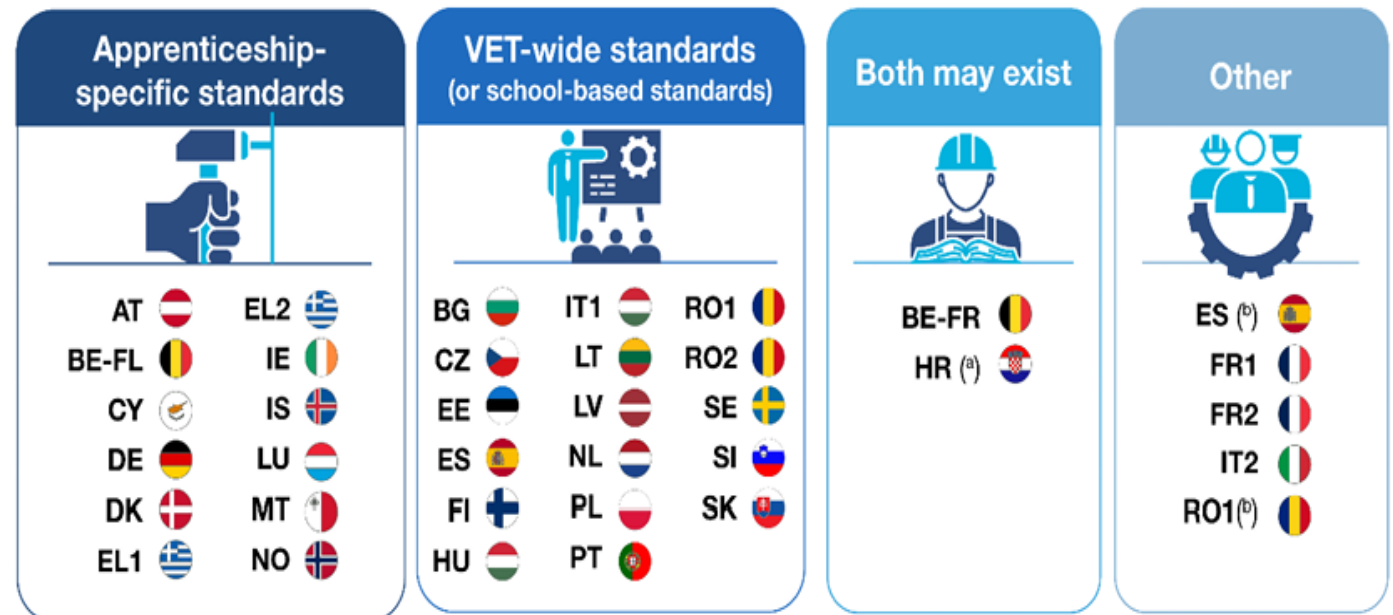
- **Generally, learning outcomes are comprehensive and balanced**
 - Requirements and specifications for general/cross-cutting skills are identified across the board



- **All schemes follow centrally set standards, but these are VET-wide more often than not**
 - In only 41% of the schemes, LOs are explicitly set for the workplace (apprenticeship-specific standards)
 - VET-wide standards usually do not specify what is to be taught/developed at the workplace

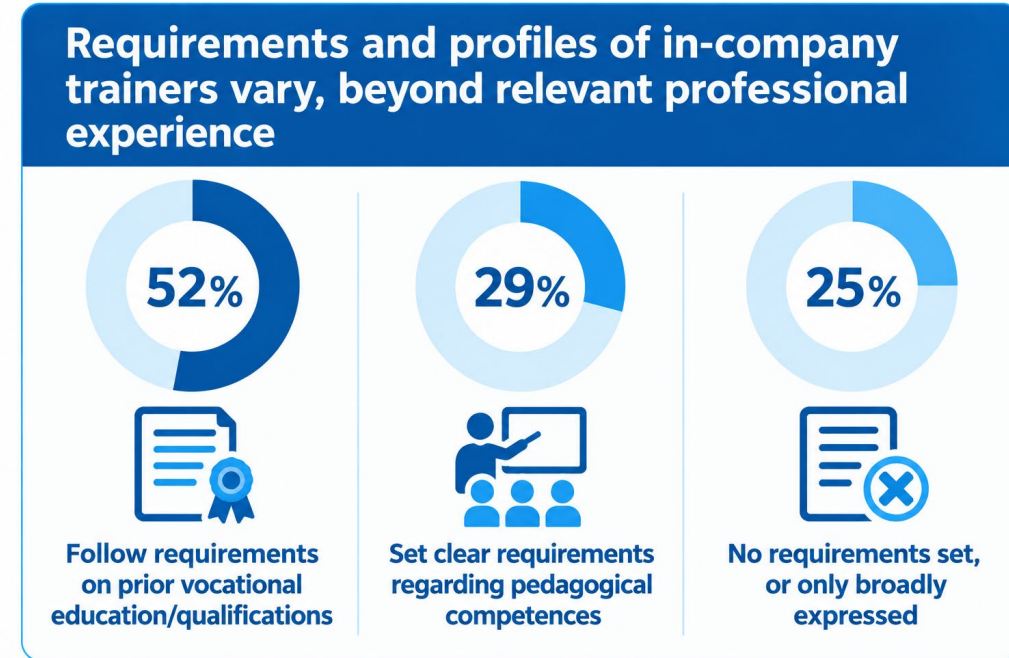
- In more than half of the schemes, this heavily/exclusively relies on agreement between the specific school and the training company

- **Little evidence of structured, systematic participation of employer/employee representatives in the adaptation of curricula at the local level**



Criterion 3: Pedagogical support

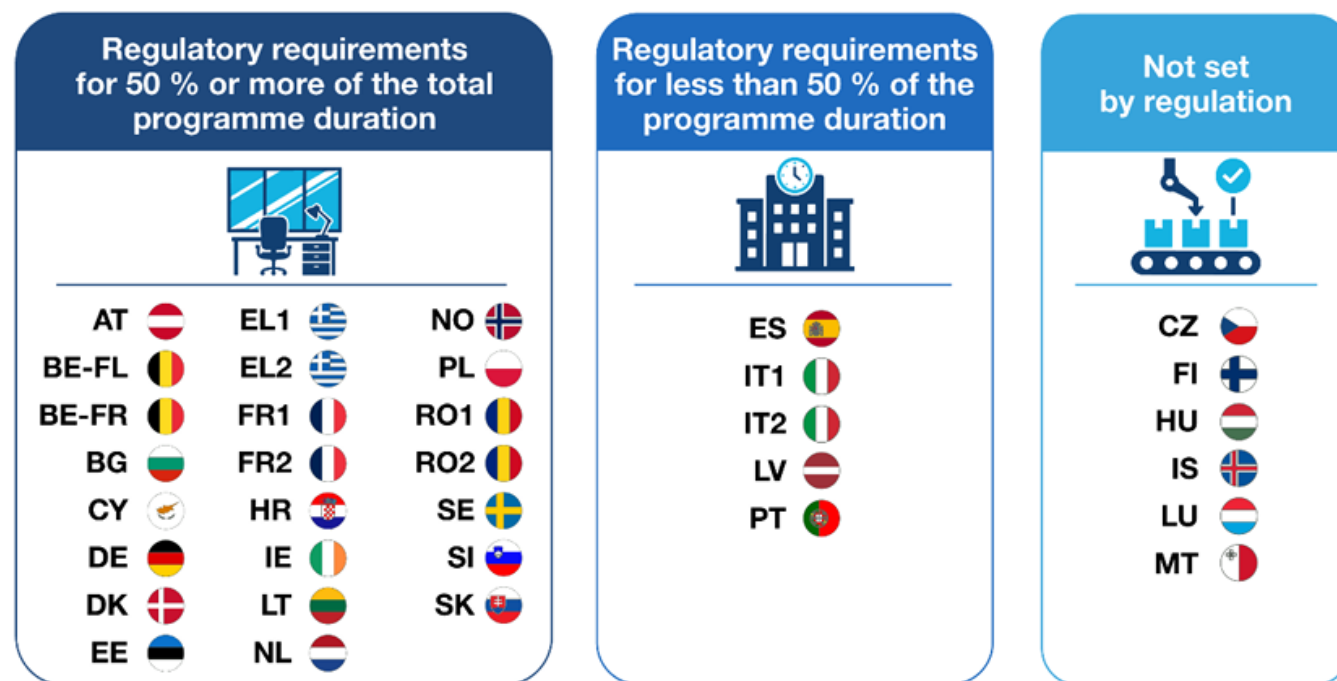
- **Across all schemes, in-company trainers need to be appointed**
 - Various titles (trainer, tutor, mentor), often signalling different roles
 - In 1/3 of the schemes, *more than one role* is required



- **Continuing professional development is unevenly addressed**
 - Teachers' CPD is frequently regulated (requirements and/or rights), and opportunities exist
 - For in-company trainers, training opportunities are frequently identified (65% of the schemes), but
 - Requirements for their CPD are rarely identified
- **Teacher-trainer collaboration structures were identified in fewer than half of the schemes**
 - E.g.: apprenticeship coordinator acting as link, intermediary body, or digital tool

Criterion 4: Workplace component

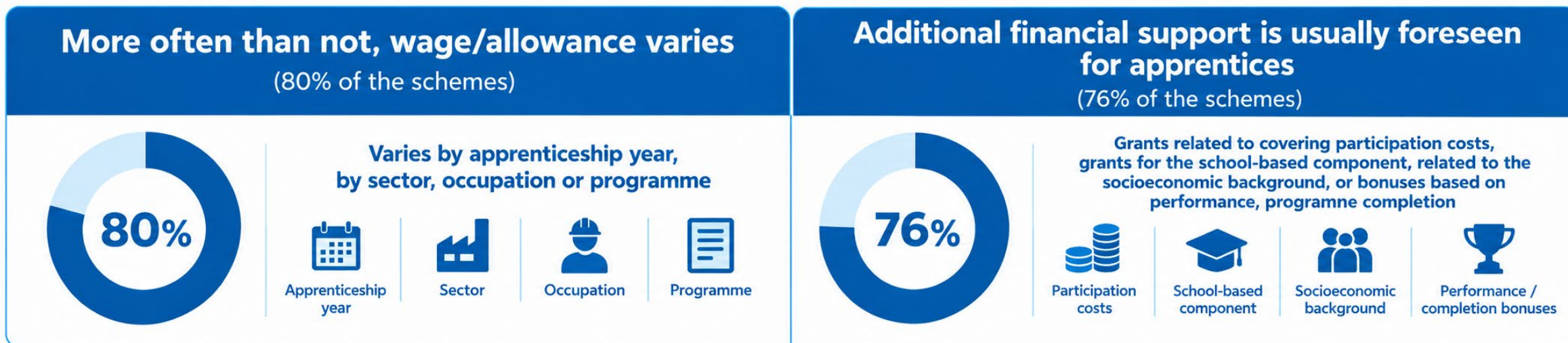
- **Alternation between two learning venues is usually foreseen by regulation**
 - In 29 of the 34 schemes analysed (85%), regulations clearly stipulate alternation
 - In 5 schemes, a programme may take place entirely at the workplace (including its theoretical part)
- **The share of the workplace component usually exceeds 50% of the total duration**
 - 68%: clearly specify that the workplace component should be at least 50 %
- **The duration of apprenticeship schemes usually varies (71%)**
 - Variation depends on, e.g. the occupation/specialty, the learner group or the type of provider
 - Usually, fixed duration is most frequent in schemes at the upper secondary level (and usually 3- or 4-year-long)



Source: Cedefop.

Criterion 5: Pay and/or compensation

- In all cases, apprentices receive a wage (taxable) or an allowance (non-taxable)
 - In 71% of the schemes, apprentices receive taxable remuneration (a wage)
 - If the two options coexist, usually the employer chooses between wage or allowance (depends on agreement)
 - In half of the schemes, remuneration covers both the school-based and workplace components
 - In another 7 schemes, it covers only the workplace, but may be complemented by other support
 - 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
- In nearly all schemes, wage/allowance is based on national regulation or collective agreements
 - Very few cases: wage is exclusively based on company-apprentice negotiations



Criterion 6: Social protection

Criterion 7: Work, health and safety conditions

- **The extent of social protection coverage varies**
 - In 68% of the schemes, apprentices enjoy a rather comprehensive set of social protection provisions (provisions linked to pensions, unemployment, insolvency, leave, etc.)
 - In the remaining 1/3, social protection is more limited in scope (e.g. relating to accidents or sickness)
 - Variation usually depends on the type of agreement that applies, and/or the age of learners
- **Requirements on working conditions, health and safety are set in all schemes**
 - Different bases, e.g. labour law, collective agreements, VET/apprenticeship law, quality frameworks, agreements/contract templates
 - Checked as part of accreditation procedures, if such procedures are in place
 - If apprentices sign some form of contract, labour inspection authorities have a clear(er) mandate to monitor working conditions, including health and safety

Criteria 1-7: Cross-cutting messages and social dialogue

- **Strong foundations and further incremental improvement since 2021**
 - All seven criteria are generally addressed; core rights and protections are mostly in place
 - E.g., there's always remuneration, some type of agreement, a trainer and a training plan, and usually more than 50% of the time at the workplace
- **Quality goes beyond compliance**
 - Qualitative differences concern the depth, consistency and interconnections between criteria

Areas for discussion / further attention

- The *type of written agreement* affects the status attached to apprentices, the extent of social protection and, in many cases, the type of remuneration (its basis, and possible height)
 - In 1/3 of the schemes, social protection is basic and remuneration only covers the workplace
- The *basis of workplace learning* may affect the quality, comparability, comprehensiveness of learning
 - Lack of clear references for the workplace component in more than half of the schemes
 - Additional effort required from teachers and trainers
 - Absence of employer/trade-union involvement
 - Coupled with varying requirements for in-company trainers.

Framework conditions: EFQEA criteria 8-14

8. Regulatory framework



- Clear and consistent regulatory framework
- Structured dialogue among all relevant stakeholders and the roles of labour-market actors in decision-making or coordination
- Accreditation procedures for companies and workplaces
- Sanctions on companies that fail to deliver training

9. Involvement of social partners



- Role of social partners at the design level (qualifications and curricula)
- Role of social partners at the implementation level
- Contribution at the sectoral level

10. Support for companies



- Financial support
- Non-financial support
- Cost-sharing arrangements regarding apprentice remuneration, including the use of training funds

11. Flexible pathways and mobility



- Entry requirements for apprenticeship programmes
- Improving access through RPL or preparatory courses
- Apprenticeship qualifications included in the NQFs
- Progression opportunities
- Accumulation of units of learning outcomes
- International mobility of apprentices

12. Career guidance and awareness raising



- Awareness raising and guidance before joining apprenticeships
- Access to guidance during apprenticeships
- Access to learner support during apprenticeships

13. Transparency



- Information on apprenticeships being publicly available
- Apprenticeship placements being publicly available

14. Quality assurance and tracking of apprentices



- Comprehensive quality assurance mechanisms for apprenticeships
- Processes allowing a valid and reliable assessment of the learning outcomes
- Graduate-tracking mechanisms
- Cost-benefit analyses or stakeholder satisfaction surveys

Criterion 8: Regulatory framework

- **All the schemes are underpinned by legislation/regulations (formal schemes)**
 - Definitions of apprenticeships and/or apprentices exist in 82% of all schemes
 - The *clarity* of the regulatory framework should not be taken for granted
- **Platforms for structured and systematic dialogue identified in nearly 80% of the schemes**
 - In 47% of the schemes, joint tripartite coordinating bodies or councils/boards with significant co-deciding power
 - In 11 schemes, the role of social partners and other key stakeholders is mostly advisory
 - very few cases of apprenticeship/learner associations participating in dialogue
- **Structured accreditation procedures for companies were identified in 53% of the schemes**
 - In the rest, schools have the additional task of assessing case-by-case without a clear basis
- **Sanctions for companies that fail to provide training were identified in 56% of the schemes**
 - E.g. accreditation withdrawal, return of funding, financial penalties

Criterion 9: Involvement of social partners

- **Significant involvement/contribution at the design level**
 - In 94% of the schemes, role in (co)designing qualifications
 - In 79% of the schemes, role in (co)shaping curricula
- **Less present at the implementation level**
 - Usually active in promoting apprenticeships, but beyond that, contribution is somewhat limited
 - In only 44% of the schemes, social partners have a comprehensive role at the implementation level, i.e. contribute to a combination of different tasks/functions (company accreditation + monitor quality of in-company training + have a role in final assessment)
- **Notable contributions at the sectoral level**
 - Sectoral councils or similar structures have a role in 62% of the schemes
 - Usually in skills anticipation, qualification design
 - Fewer examples about training in-company trainers, mobilising sectoral training funds

Criterion 10: Support for companies

- **Financial support for training companies is widely available (94% of the schemes)**
 - 74% of the schemes: grants/subsidies
 - 50% of the schemes: tax deductions/waivers, including contributions to social protection
 - 62% of the schemes: other type, e.g. compensation of in-company trainers' time/wage
 - 53% of the schemes: incentives are horizontal (not adjusted to company size, sector, region etc.)
- **In almost all schemes, at least one type of non-financial support is offered**
 - Campaigns (74%), training of trainers (65%), administrative support by chambers etc. (65%)
 - Only half of the schemes offer a comprehensive enabling environment (i.e. more than three types of financial support of the six types examined),
 - in one quarter of the schemes, only one type or no non-financial support is reported.
- **In about 80% of the schemes, cost-sharing arrangements are rather fair and equitable**
 - But in 20% of the schemes, employers' share of the total wage/allowance is effectively very small, either due to regulation or due to high subsidisation
 - The use of training funds *for apprenticeship* was identified in 11 schemes (32%).

Criterion 11: Flexible pathways and mobility

- **Participation requirements for learners become increasingly flexible**
 - In 57% of the schemes, no upper age limit is set (only the minimum entry age, if any)
- **Recognition of prior learning: regulations/arrangements *clearly* identified in 56% of the schemes**
 - Usually related to adult participation
 - Preparatory courses to facilitate entry identified in 8 schemes (24%)
- **Nearly all schemes lead to qualifications listed in NQFs**
 - 65% of the schemes lead to VET-wide qualifications
 - 8 schemes lead to apprenticeship-specific qualifications (as the only way to acquire them)
 - 4 schemes can lead to either VET-wide or apprenticeship-specific ones
 - 44% of the schemes offer qualifications at EQF 5 or higher
- **Direct progression to higher levels of education (EQF5+) is possible in 3/4 of all schemes)**
- **Accumulation of units of learning outcomes is generally possible**
- **Provisions for apprentice mobility were identified across the board**
 - but usually limited in scope (26% have provisions in four or more of the categories examined)

Criterion 12: Career guidance and awareness raising

Criterion 13: Transparency

- **Systematic, recurring activities to raise awareness were identified in 2/3 of the schemes**
 - 65% of the schemes: campaigns to attract learners (either horizontal or for specific learner groups)
 - Very few cases of taster programmes were identified
- **Guidance services or structures *possibly* open to apprentices identified in all schemes**
 - In 47% of the schemes, these are apprenticeship-specific
 - In 53% of the schemes, common to VET/ET guidance services, or services for adults (PES etc)
- **Learner support services or established practices were identified in most schemes**
 - 24/34 schemes (71%): psychological support or support to overcome learning difficulties and complete the programme
- Platforms/tools for systematically making information on apprenticeship offers publicly available: 62%
- Platforms/tools for employers to post the available apprenticeship placements: 59%

Criterion 14: Quality assurance and tracking of apprentices

- **Quality assurance approaches identified in all schemes**
 - More frequently, concern data collection on KPIs (enrolments, completions, dropouts)
 - QA processes to monitor the quality of the training offered is less prominent/evident, esp. for the workplace
- **Processes underpinning *reliable assessment*/final examination are broadly identified**
- **Graduate tracking mechanisms/exercises identified in almost 2/3 of the schemes (59%)**
 - Usually, VET wide ones
- **Other forms of evaluation rarely reported (24%)**
 - Cost-benefits analyses, employer and learner satisfaction surveys, teacher/trainer surveys
 - Somewhat irregular

Criteria 8-14: Cross-cutting messages and social dialogue

- **Several areas of strength across the EU, and activity in less addressed areas since 2021**
 - Link to the NQFs
 - Progression to higher education levels is generally possible (fewer bottlenecks)
 - Guidance services in principle available
 - Financial support for employers always available, some non-financial support complements
 - A minimum level of monitoring
- **Like in learning and working conditions, also here, the depth of coverage varies**
 - Clarity of the regulatory framework, esp. when apprenticeships run in parallel to school-based VET
 - Involvement of social partners in coordination and decision-making has been relatively limited and stable compared to 2021 (53% of the schemes: essentially an advisory role)
 - Comprehensiveness of non-financial support to employers: how many types of support are in place? is the framework really enabling?
 - When VET-wide services exist (e.g. for RPL, guidance, learner support), more research will be needed to understand if they really reach apprentices

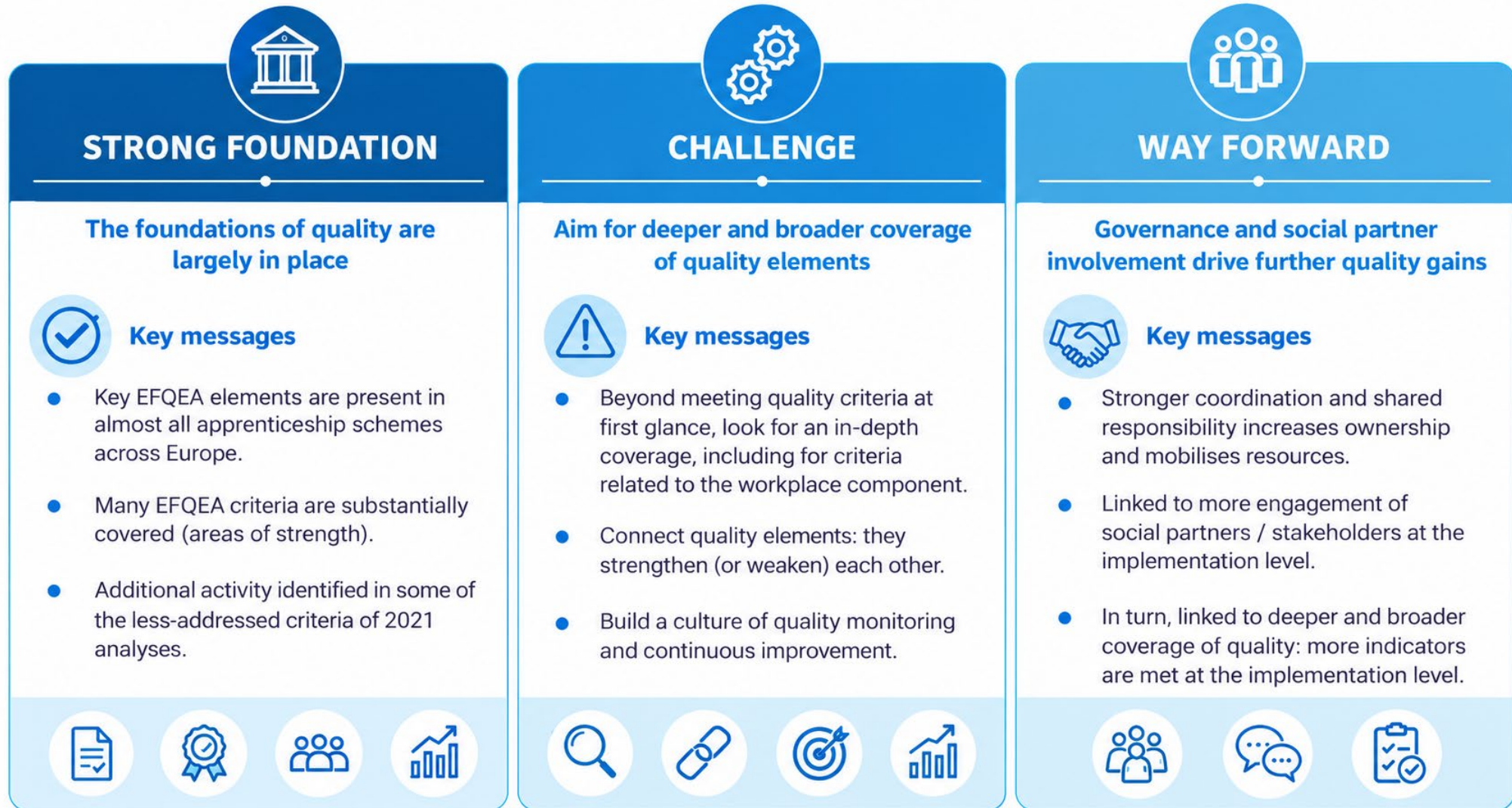
Social dialogue and quality: the significance of social partner contribution to coordination and co-decision

Social partner involvement unlocks deeper and broader coverage of quality criteria

- Stronger role of social partners in coordination/joint decision-making →
- Bigger contribution at the implementation level
- Which, in turn, is associated with
 - Coverage of more quality indicators (**broader** coverage)
 - **Deeper** coverage of several indicators

Virtuous cycle: Roles → Responsibilities → Resources

The emerging picture



Thank you

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