

UEAPME¹ position

Proposal for a Council Recommendation on a European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships COM (2017) 563

On 5 October 2017, the European Commission published its proposal for a Council Recommendation on a European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships.

Key messages

- UEAPME welcomes and supports the Framework, as a good example of an EU initiative that adds value on top of and supporting social partners' work in the field of education and training.²
- With this bottom-up and demand-led approach, based on the needs of employers and learners, a proposal has been reached that reflects the interests of stakeholders responsible to deliver quality and effective apprenticeships on the ground.
- UEAPME believes that this Framework constructively addresses the objective of increasing the attractiveness of apprenticeship for both employers and learners. Apprenticeship is beneficial for Crafts and SMEs when it responds to their skills needs and enhances the possibility of good employment for young people.
- The proposal rightly recognises the need for a reinforced cooperation between the world of education and the world of work, and that businesses are genuine learning environments, where learners acquire skills for jobs and for life.
- Crafts and SMEs are the main providers of apprenticeship throughout Europe. However, they need a strong support system in the Member States and the right framework conditions to make provision of apprenticeship placements more attractive. This includes the involvement of social partners and Crafts and SME organisations and chambers in the governance of apprenticeship systems.
- If fully implemented, this Framework will contribute to higher esteem of vocational training and apprenticeship.
- **UEAPME calls on Member States to adopt the proposal**, and implement the reforms where necessary, including more efforts to introduce apprenticeship at tertiary level of education and training.

¹ UEAPME subscribes to the EC's Register of Interest Representatives and to the related code of conduct as requested by the European Transparency Initiative. Our ID number is 55820581197-35

² The proposal was based largely on work done by social partners. Employers undertook a [project on the cost-effectiveness of apprenticeship](#), and social partners issued [a statement towards a joint vision](#). They then contributed to an [Opinion on the Advisory Committee on Vocational Training](#), including the Member States, addressed to the Commission, to undertake action.

Apprenticeship Framework – Challenges and conditions for Crafts and SMEs

As the main providers of apprenticeship in Europe, Crafts and SME organisations play a crucial role as support structures for smaller businesses.³ **Acting as intermediary bodies, SME organisations, chambers of crafts and chambers of commerce support small businesses in the governance and functioning of apprenticeship systems**, according to the national specificities. Their responsibilities include inter alia the registration of apprenticeship contracts, assisting small companies in the recruitment process/choice of candidates, supervision of the company-based training components, improving the quality of tutoring, assessing the suitability of training firms, contributing to the design of curricula and arranging examinations.

SMEs, in particular micro-companies, need a strong support system in the Member States and the right framework conditions to make provision of apprenticeship places more attractive. A sound business case and a promising perspective for a return on investment in apprenticeship are needed. Costs are an important issue for micro-companies. They should be out-weighted with the help of a good governance and partnership system. This includes the direct involvement of social partners and SME organisations in the governance of demand-led apprenticeship systems, based on a strong partnership with VET schools at local and regional level. This is necessary to achieve ownership by employers, to contribute to designing and updating training regulations and curricula in line with the skills required on the labour market, and to ensure the relevance, recognition, and quality of the respective qualifications obtained through apprenticeship.

Particular challenges for the provision of apprenticeship currently include the lack of basic skills among learners entering in apprenticeship programmes. **Ensuring the quality of general education systems is a prerequisite for the continued efforts of businesses to provide apprenticeship placements.** Many small enterprises are ready to prepare young people for a professional career, but the general education systems have to deliver on the required basic skills. Without that, it is difficult to get a sufficient return on investment. Apprenticeship systems should not be seen merely as a tool for social inclusion, but should be promoted through quality and excellence, to be attractive for employers and learners.

When it comes to the working conditions for apprentices as described in the proposed Framework, UEAPME insists that the entitlement for social protection does not lead to obligations for employers to pay in full all social protection entitlements under national law. **Social protection and other entitlements need to be affordable for employers and adapted to the national context.** It is for social partners at national or sectoral level to negotiate such arrangements.

UEAPME also points to the **need for better guidance and orientation for learners**, before starting a VET pathway. It is important to promote and increase the esteem of VET and work-based learning at all levels.

The Framework for quality and effective apprenticeship needs to leave room for national diversity to develop schemes according to their labour market. The Recommendation will make an important contribution to improving education and training systems throughout Europe, in the interest of employers and learners.

29.01.18

³ See further our paper on the contribution of Crafts and SMEs to Apprenticeship, written on the occasion of the launch of the European Alliance for Apprenticeship: http://ueapme.com/IMG/pdf/UEAPME_paper_contribution_of_Crafts_and_SMEs_to_apprenticeships.pdf - and here some testimonies on the role of and challenges for SME organisations: <http://ueapme.com/spip.php?rubrique236>