
Answer to ad-hoc social partner consultation

Input on a proposal for a Council Recommendation establishing a Quality Framework for Apprenticeships

CESI highlights the importance of being consulted in written on a Quality Framework for Apprenticeships, given that this is a priority for many member organisations. At the same time, CESI regrets that there was a tight, three-week deadline to respond to this consultation, which was insufficient time to compile a comprehensive and detailed position based on contributions of all members.

As with previous similar ad-hoc consultations on different topics, CESI encourages the European Commission to set longer deadlines and make announcements longer in advance, and in this context to also make some spaces available at hearings for recognised sectoral social partner organisations which are not a member of a horizontal social partner organisation but which have nevertheless a strong interest to contribute with their views. Representing more than 5 million employees across Europe, CESI advocates and highlights the added value of a lived trade union pluralism in which every worker counts.

General guiding principles on the questions raised in the consultation background document

1) *Do you consider the description of the problem in this paper correct and sufficient?*

As a qualifying element to the description of the problem, CESI notes that a successful transition to the labour market does not only depend on the quality of an apprenticeship but is in many cases primarily conditioned by a selection processes run by employers following the end of apprenticeships.

Moreover, both apprenticeship offers as well as successful transitions to the labour market thereafter depend on demand/supply mechanism: Where in an industry or region there is little demand for incomers, there will only be few open apprentice positions and few possibilities for employment thereafter. Offering voluntary mobility schemes in this context is important.

Furthermore, in the elaboration on a quality framework for apprenticeships, the background paper does not take the varying levels of previous educational attainments of apprentices sufficiently into consideration: Apprentices with lower degrees of previous education have different needs than others with higher levels of previous education.

- 2) *Do you consider that establishing a Quality Framework for Apprenticeships at European level could be the right vehicle to improve the quality of apprenticeships and ensure effective investments and the implementation of EU programmes?*

It could bring real added value if it provides for certain minimum standards (see section 3 below), fosters voluntary mobility as a tool to make apprentices autonomous and self-reliant, and brings a better coordination of apprenticeships at the EU-level. This includes (1) a further facilitation of common certificates and hence a better mutual recognition of apprenticeships among the Member States; (2) foreign language competences and English as an integral part of apprentice formation; and (3) a procedural simplification and further development of mobility schemes such as Erasmus.

At the same time, the diverse nature of apprenticeship systems across Member States should preclude far-going alignment efforts.

- 3) *In your opinion, what are the main elements for a quality framework, in particular considering a) quality criteria; b) enabling factors; c) European funding instruments?*

Above all, it is vital that there is a work contract/learning agreement which sets out the duration, working hours in line with EU and national labour law, accurate and realistic goals and targets as well as rights, duties and responsibilities for apprenticeships. All apprentices should be remunerated for their work and be covered by social security and social benefits. Health and safety rules should apply.

Agreements/contracts should to be put in place and learning processes supervised and monitored at the micro-level by means of an effective interplay between apprenticeship tutors of the employer and VET teacher. Tutors could be rewarded for successful work; authorities should keep an eye on supervisory mechanisms and quality monitoring. A final exam should be part of the ensuring the quality of an apprenticeship.

- 4) *What role do you see for social partners and chambers in this framework?*

According to CESI, a quality framework for apprenticeships should also apply to the public sector. To this end, CESI and its member organisations stand ready to work with institutions, authorities and other social partners in the development, monitoring and improvement of apprenticeship quality assurance schemes.