



European Confederation of Independent Trade Unions (CESI)

CESI Youth

Position paper

Bridging education and the world of work *With a focus on apprenticeships*

Further information

European Confederation of Independent Trade Unions (CESI)

info@cesi.org

+32 2 228 18 60

www.cesi.org

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European Confederation of Independent Trade Unions

Confédération Européenne des Syndicats Indépendants ★ Confederazione Europea dei Sindacati Indipendenti

Europäische Union Unabhängiger Gewerkschaften ★ Confederación Europea de Sindicatos Independientes

Avenue de la Joyeuse Entrée 1-5, B-1040 Bruxelles ★ Tel. +32.(0)2.282.18.70 ★ Fax. +32.(0)2.282.18.71

Internet: <http://www.cesi.org> ★ email: info@cesi.org

Representing more than 5 million employees across Europe, CESI advocates and highlights the added value of truly experienced trade union pluralism in which every worker counts. CESI Youth is a platform which gives a voice to our young affiliates so that they may express their views and perspectives on today's society and needs regarding employment issues and conditions. Apprenticeships are a significant tool to tackle unemployment. By their very nature, they particularly concern young people.

Apprenticeships are defined as education and training programmes which combine company-based training with school-based education, leading to national recognised qualifications.¹ **Vocational Education and Training (VET)**, which embrace apprenticeships, can be defined as learning pathways aiming to equip people with knowledge, know-how, skills or competences required in particular occupations or provide a wider range of skills for the labour market.

With the frame of the [New Skills Agenda and in light of the European Pillar of Social Rights](#), the European Commission launched a [proposal for a European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeship in October 2017](#). The proposal follows the 2016 New Skills Agenda for Europe and specifically aims at providing a coherent framework for apprenticeships based on a common understanding of what defines quality and effectiveness, taking into account the diversity of vocational education and training (VET) systems in Member States.

Furthermore, the European Commission had proposed to launch a pilot 'Erasmus Pro' project, part of the Erasmus + scheme, which would broaden the possibilities of financing the mobility of apprentices and increase financial resources for apprenticeships.

In its proposal for a **European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships**, the European Commission suggested 14 key criteria that should be respected in the implementation of successful apprenticeship systems.

Generally speaking, both CESI and its youth platform, CESI Youth, welcome initiatives which aim at boosting apprenticeships in Europe. The Quality Framework for Apprenticeships at EU level could bring added value to the system, providing for certain minimum standards, fostering voluntary mobility as a tool to make apprentices autonomous and self-reliant, and bringing a better coordination of apprenticeships at EU level.

¹ Apprenticeships are to be distinguished from traineeships and internships. Traineeships are not linked to recognised qualifications, and usually run for few months only. Internships are often even shorter, and are frequently carried out by people looking for experience before job-hunting.

I. CESI's position regarding the criteria established in the European Commission proposal for a European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships

CESI welcomes all the criteria set out in the EC proposal as crucial for the good operation and development of apprenticeships across Europe.

Regarding the quality criterion to formalise apprenticeships through written contracts, work **contracts/learning agreements** need to set forth the duration, working hours, accurate and realistic goals and targets as well as the rights, duties and responsibilities for apprenticeships.

Furthermore, all apprentices should be **remunerated** and covered by **social protection**, in line with national policies.

Regarding the pedagogical side of such schemes, apprenticeships need to make sure they make the **transition from school to work easier** by enhancing the employability of learners and providing them with the skills needed for the labour market. At the same time, apprenticeships must ensure they also **provide benefits for companies and society** at large.

To support this aim, **company trainers** should be designated in order to provide and make sure the apprentices learn and acquire the adequate skills. **Feedback and evaluation schemes** should be developed in order to help both sides benefit from each other.

Moreover, the **flexibility of pathways and mobility of apprentices** are crucial. Both apprenticeship offers and successful transitions to the labour market depend on supply and demand. If there is little demand for newcomers in a specific industry or region, few apprentice positions should be offered because there will be little opportunity for employment thereafter.

CESI reiterates the importance of the **involvement of social partners** in the development and implementation of high-quality apprenticeships and work-based learning schemes in order to respect national industrial relation systems as well as education and training practices.

CESI further recommends:

- that **foreign language competences**, mostly English, become an integral part of apprenticeships (training);
- the EU bring about a **procedural simplification** of mobility schemes such as Erasmus+ and Erasmus Pro and work towards further developments in this domain;
- that the European Commission further increases the **budget** for Erasmus Pro, offering more mobile work placements for apprentices;
- The Member States and the EU encourage more employers to consider and support their apprentices to get this type of experience.

II. CESI stresses the importance of bridging education and the world of work through the increased value granted to vocational training and apprenticeships

Apprenticeships are too often seen as a second choice by young people, parents and society at large. Yet high-quality learning outcomes for VET and apprenticeships would better prepare students for life and good jobs.

Against the background of an urgent need to bring young people into employment, **apprenticeship** systems need to be revalued. Appropriate measures must aim at making VET and apprenticeships **more attractive**.

CESI particularly demands that:

- the **role and status** of VET **teachers**, trainers and school leaders is improved;
- the **Riga Conclusions** (2015) and the goals of the European Alliance for Apprenticeships are implemented in full;
- high-quality apprenticeships are **conceptualised** and that their **benefits for learners, businesses and the society** are promoted through regular initiatives, mobilising all relevant stakeholders at EU, national, regional and local levels (e.g. European Vocational Skills Week);
- further **investments** in the VET systems are promoted, in particular regarding the support for apprenticeships/work-based learning exchange programmes with third countries;
- Spending on education and human resources is to be increasingly seen as a **social investment**.

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III. Transmission of knowledge, values and the capacity to critical thinking

CESI believes that regardless of the education scheme in place, education and training remain tools to transmit **general knowledge and values**. They cannot merely aim at increasing the employability of the young. A human being is not a spineless subject to the needs of the economy. The latter must serve the former.

Conveying general knowledge, know-how and values to young people allows them to actively participate in the **construction of their individuality and identity**. In today's world, where new technologies allow the permanent, unfiltered flow of information, more than ever before, human beings need to be able to think critically and must have a strong identity. Anyone who opens up to the outside world must know him/herself well.

Education and training have to bolster the capacity for **civic participation** and **respect for democratic values and tolerance** – not least as a tool to foster an open-minded and responsible citizenry to prevent radicalisation and intolerance of any kind.