



**NAAGRCY**

National Authorities for Apprenticeship:  
Companies as Sustainable Partners for Apprenticeship in Greece & Cyprus

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**Companies as Sustainable Partners  
for Apprenticeship in Greece and Cyprus**

**WP3: Develop and Adaptation of In-Companies  
Apprenticeship Procedures**



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## GUIDELINE

### “ESTABLISHMENT OF APPRENTICESHIP INTERMEDIARY NETWORKS BETWEEN ENTERPRISES AND VET SCHOOLS”

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## 1. Introduction

The aim of the present guide is to describe and analyze the operation of intermediary networks (or alternatively intermediary mechanisms) for apprenticeships, as a main tool, able to enhance the participation of micro, small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in apprenticeship programs in both Greece and Cyprus. In fact, these networks build on the development of similar practices in countries with effective apprenticeship systems, notably Germany.

The operation of the specific bodies, in several countries, presents a considerable number of similarities regarding the issues which are eligible to manipulate. On the other side, the main differentiations are closely related with the structure of the specific mechanisms, as well as, with the general operational environment of specific institutions and organizations (i.e. VET providers, chambers, social partners). However, it is of utmost importance to be taken into consideration the fact that similar incentives from abroad, follows a strong tradition of institutionalized procedures regarding decision making process related with VET and mainly apprenticeships.

By taking into consideration the above mentioned observations, the present guide is divided in five main chapters. The first one constitutes the introductory part where it will be described incentives undertaken from International Organizations (i.e. European Commission, CEDEFOP, ILO) which among others focus on the value of intermediary mechanisms in the productive operation of apprenticeships, as well as, a short presentation of similar bodies evident in effective models of apprenticeships from different countries.

The second chapter will describe the necessity of the specific mechanism, while it will present a number of issues related with its structure and funding. The third chapter will describe the main tasks undertaken in order to enhance the participation of SMEs in apprenticeship programs. Chapter four will present the main responsibilities included in

the framework of “Register of Cooperating Enterprises” while, chapter five focuses in the support of SMEs during their participation in apprenticeships.

## 1.1 Effective Apprenticeships as a priority issue for international organizations

During the last years, apprenticeships have become a major priority among all the international organizations as a main tool of facing youth unemployment and creating productive labour positions according to market needs. International organizations and institutions like, *European Commission* (i.e. EC, 2013; EC, 2016), *European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training* (i.e. CEDEFOP, 2015; CEDEFOP, 2014a; CEDEFOP, 2014b), *International Labour Organization* (i.e. ILO, 2012; ILO, 2013), *Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development* (i.e. OECD, 2012), as well as, European social partners (i.e. UEAPME and Business Europe and CEEP and ETUC, 2016) emphasize to the role of apprenticeships in a multiple level. The specific perception is established to a large amount of relevant documents (policy papers, comparative researches, briefing notes, cooperative memorandums) which among others emphasize on the active participation of social partners in the establishment of effective systems of apprenticeships. In the same vein, the creation of intermediary mechanisms constitutes a necessary precondition for implementing effective systems of apprenticeships. Although the specific bodies can be differentiated to a large extent (i.e. responsible organization, fields of intervention, legal status) a number of considerable notifications can be made regarding their operation:

- the involvement of intermediary networks through the institutions and organizations that they represent constitutes a necessary precondition in the governance of apprenticeship systems,
- effective apprenticeship systems rely heavily on the presence of intermediary networks, especially if they are organized within a local and sectoral level,
- the representativeness of the intermediary networks as well as their legal recognition promote the effective cooperation and the general acceptance of the decisions adopted regarding the operation of apprenticeships,

- institutionalized operation of intermediary mechanisms contributes to the building of a sufficient and productive Quality Assurance Framework,
- apprenticeship works best when a number of issues like promotion, administration and oversight are organized by a single body and not by a different number of bodies, especially if intermediary mechanisms are organized within a local or sectoral level

## 1.2 Related interventions and initiatives undertaken in effective apprenticeship systems in Europe

As mentioned above the effectiveness of an apprenticeship system is related with the manipulation of a number of issues by a single body and not by different institutions or organizations. Among others, the specific bodies are authorized to handle issues like the promoting of apprenticeships, cooperative decision making process, general acceptance of the role of participating institutions etc. Moreover, several other issues are connected with the operation of the specific bodies like providing business intelligence and advice, finding and advising new host companies, liaising with current employers, and administering apprentice contracts and examinations.

Similar mechanisms have been evolutionized in almost all effective apprenticeship systems across Europe like the “Competent Bodies” of Germany (Hensen- Reifgens and Hippach-Schneider,2014: 10) the “Apprenticeships Offices” of Austria (BFI, 2016: 2-3), the “Cantonal VET Offices” of Switzerland (Zarifis and Zanolà and Fotopoulos and Manavi, 2017: 36-41) or the “Educational and Training Committees” in Denmark (CEDEFOP, 2012: 46-50). Although in most cases the specific bodies undertake similar jurisdictions, as mentioned above, their framework of operation differentiates according to the concrete characteristics of each country. Factors of differentiation might constitute the political system of each country (i.e. federal, cantons, powerful local administration, central oriented states), the institutions that are responsible for the operation of the specific bodies (i.e. Chambers, VET providers), the related bodies that participate in the decision making process (i.e. advisory committees in a central or local level, VET providers).

However, what seems to be unquestionable in all the above mentioned examples is the fact that is followed a bottom up procedure in all the fields of involvement. This condition is also



pictured in the role that the state withholds where the decision making process, is actually closely related with the initiatives and proposals undertaken by social partners, chambers and VET providers (i.e. proposals posed by social partners, technical committees, advisory bodies). The specific methodology is followed as a necessary precondition in order to be enhanced the cooperation, as well as, the supporting of SMEs involved in the apprenticeship programs.

In addition, the effective operation of the specific bodies is closely related with the implementation of two necessary preconditions. *The first* is the institutionalization of the framework under which the aforementioned institutions operate and which should be commonly accepted by all the involved parties (social partners, chambers, Vet providers, and involved ministries). *The second* is the clear definition of the tasks each partner should undertake regarding the operation of the specific bodies.

## 2. The Intermediary Networks: necessity, structure and funding

### 2.1 The necessity of the intervention

The establishment of the Apprenticeship Intermediary Networks aims to resolve the following problems in the Greek and Cypriot apprenticeship systems:

- Ineffective identification of labour market needs (at the local and national level), which are often related to the lack of necessary specialties and updated curricula.
- Limited role of social partners in the decision-making process.
- Ineffective cooperation between all the stakeholders (e.g. providers of Vocational Education and Training, public employment services, competent ministries, social partners).
- Lack of awareness and sufficient information regarding the advantages of the participation of SMEs.
- Lack of effective cooperations between companies in providing apprenticeship placements.
- Limited participation of all the stakeholders in the development of school-based and work-based learning curricula.
- Lack of necessary incentives for SMEs, which could further motivate their participation in apprenticeship programmes.
- Limited level of SMEs' support during their participation in an apprenticeship program.

Moreover, as a result of the current socioeconomic crisis, the creation of intermediary networks needs to take into consideration the conditions under which SMEs operate both in terms of internal and external environment. The unwillingness of SMEs to offer apprenticeship positions in many cases is closely related to a number of issues like:

- the fact that they operate under very uncertain conditions where the level of future viability is very uncertain,
- the lack of specific motives and benefits (both financial and non-financial), deriving from their participation in the program,
- the lack of proper capability and human resources in order to handle the apprenticeship process,

- the lack of necessary equipment,
- the limited level of sufficient information concerning apprenticeships,
- the rather fluid and inconsistent framework related with VET education, and more precise issues like apprenticeship and traineeships, where in many cases it is not possible to distinguish between different offered programs,
- the low standards of apprentices (concerning the acquired knowledge, skills, competences),
- the lack of understanding on the necessity of apprenticeship,
- the low image/reputation of apprenticeships,
- the fact that the great majority of companies in Cyprus and Greece are micro companies, therefore the human resources and infrastructure are too limited for their contribution with all means,

## **2.2 Proposal on the structure and operation of the Apprenticeship Intermediary Networks**

The establishment of apprenticeship Intermediary Networks has two main aims: firstly, to enhance the participation of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in apprenticeship programmes in Greece and Cyprus through the provision and implementation of specific activities and services; secondly, to offer specific services and support enterprises/companies already participating in apprenticeship programmes in order to eliminate/overcome barriers to their long-lasting participation. Among the specific barriers can be referred the bureaucratic issues related with apprenticeships, the rather fluid legal framework, the lack of updated curricula and specialties, the limited level of incentives for companies etc.

The successful operation of the networks is closely related with the active participation and cooperation between all the involved stakeholders, namely:

- Competent ministries
- Public providers of the Dual System of Vocational Education and Training (e.g. in Greece, OAED for EPAS schools, and the Ministry of Education for the EPAL

[Vocational Lyceum] Apprenticeship Grade; in Cyprus, the Ministry of Education and Culture for the New Modern Apprenticeship System)

- Public Employment Services
- Social partners (representing employers and employees)
- Chambers
- Companies
- Local authorities (Municipalities and Regions)
- Providers of Vocational Education and Training (e.g. EPAS, EPAL, IEK [Vocational Training Institutes], in Greece and Technical Schools in Cyprus)
- Research institutes and universities

The aforementioned bodies and organizations can be differentiated according to the specific features of the Greek and Cypriot apprenticeship systems.

The intermediary networks for apprenticeships are suggested to operate on a regional level according to the offered specialties (e.g. car, food). The tasks undertaken by the intermediary networks will be accomplished through the active participation of social partners' structures and support within a regional level and with the involvement of all the relevant stakeholders.

For the coordination and supervision of intermediary networks can be established a permanent Steering Committee which will be composed by representatives of all parties involved in the government of apprenticeship system in each country (i.e. in Cyprus: social partners, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Labour Welfare and Social Insurance or in Greece: OAED, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Labour and social partners). The Steering Committee should be institutionalized in order its proposals and decisions to have a binding character for the involved parties. The effective operation of the steering committee - and intermediary networks as well - is closely related with a commonly accepted definition of tasks, works and support each party should undertake. The Steering Committee among others will be responsible for defining the contribution each stakeholder must have under the services that will be implemented through the intermediary mechanisms.

The “Apprenticeship Office” will be the administrative and executive organ of the Apprenticeship Intermediary Networks. Depending on the necessary infrastructure, this Office could operate within the existing structures of the public providers of apprenticeship, Public Employment Services, Social Partners or Chambers. The financial and non-financial support of these intermediary mechanisms is a prerequisite for their operational effectiveness. Therefore, a commonly accepted system of financing and support must be implemented, comprising all the stakeholders. The Networks could be financed through a combination of public and private resources, particularly from the organizations, bodies and companies involved.

Finally and based on the German experience, in Annex 1, is described a number of prerequisites for the successful implementation and operation of intermediary networks between all the relevant partners, participating in the government of apprenticeships.

### **2.3 Funding and support of intermediary network**

The financial and non-financial support of intermediary networks constitutes a necessary precondition for their effective operation. A commonly accepted system of funding and support from all the involved parties must be implemented. The funding mechanism will derive from a combination of public (e.g. NSRF, Erasmus+) and private resources (e.g. companies) and more precise through the involved organizations, institutions and businesses. However it would be possible for some partners to contribute in a non-financial level, according to their capability (i.e. infrastructure, staff, technical expertise). Potential resources and support can derive from:

- Public employment service,
- related ministries,
- social partners,
- local administration,
- involved enterprises

### 3. Enhancement of SMEs participation in Apprenticeships

The limited participation of SMEs in apprenticeships is one of the most important disadvantages in the operation of the apprenticeships system in both Greece and Cyprus. This particular notification is even more important if we take into consideration the fact that SMEs constitute the great majority of the labor market in both countries in terms of labor force and businesses. Although the specific issue is rather complicated and related with the operation of the apprenticeship system as a whole, however, an intermediary network may contribute to the resolving of a number of important malfunctions.

Under the specific context, one main axis of the intermediary mechanism is the enhancement of the participation of SMEs in apprenticeships programs in order to offer placements for apprentices. The specific condition can be fulfilled through the involvement of intermediary networks to a number of issues related with apprenticeships.

#### *3.1 Communication and provision of necessary information*

Participation in an apprenticeship program requires the compliance with a number of prerequisites, which is almost impossible for an SME to be familiar with. The intermediary networks will be responsible for providing the necessary information related with the specific issues. Among others, a potential participation on behalf of an SME, requires specific knowledge in fields like labour relations, apprenticeship agreement, legal and accounting issues, organizational matters ,as well as, needs in terms of infrastructure and quality assurance.

Moreover, involved companies must be familiar with the educative obligations that must be fulfilled from the minute they offer an apprenticeship placement. As a result, participating companies must be familiar with a number of related issues like learning outcomes, the role of tutor, or procedures an apprentice must follow in order to complete his/ her studies (i.e. framework of school exams or the exams for certification), etc.

The intermediary networks will be responsible for providing the specific information not only for the new coming companies, but also for the old ones, in case there are specific changes in the aforementioned issues.

### *3.2 Incentivisation of companies*

Participation in an apprenticeship program can have multiple benefits for an enterprise which in many cases are not obvious at a first glance. Among others, offering a placement of apprenticeship has several advantages like:

- Investment in the future, by creating qualified labour force according to companies' needs,
- Profit during training as shown from several research studies (i.e. ILO 2013, UEAPME and Business Europe and CEEP, 2013) since apprentices are joining actively to the working environment of an enterprise,
- Saving costs for a company in terms of training new staff and recruitment,
- Adaptation to new techniques and technologies, since apprentices in many cases are educated in new skills and practices,
- Improvement of company's image (social responsibility)

The intermediary network will undertake the responsibility to promote the specific benefits through different channels, like publicity campaigns (see section 3.3), social dialogue, conduction of meetings with interested parties.

Moreover, the intermediary network will undertake the responsibility to propose, define and implement incentives (mainly non- financial) able to enhance the participation of SMEs, according to labour market needs. As specific incentives can be defined initiatives like:

- Customized business support for the precise definition of companies' needs in order to be chosen the most appropriate apprentice according to those needs.
- "Erasmus" for entrepreneurs which participate in apprenticeships programmes (a short period of visiting countries from abroad, ie 10 -15 days) in order to get familiar with technologies and working environments from abroad,
- Establishment of awards, for companies that participates in apprenticeships, based on specific criteria (i.e. period of participation in the program, hiring of apprentices, results of apprentices in exams and certification)
- Dissemination and publicity campaigns presenting best practices from companies participating in apprentices

- Coverage of cost for participating in apprenticeships (i.e. tutors educative program, coverage of employers cost for a given period)
- Trial period of participation in an apprenticeship program
- Creation of a specific marking for participating companies

In the proposed incentives should also be taken into consideration the potential of proposing benefits not only for SMEs but also for employees working in the specific enterprises in order to participate as tutors of apprentices (i.e. more days of leave).

### ***3.3 Conduction of dissemination and publicity campaigns***

Conduction of dissemination campaigns, may also contribute to the enhancement of the participation of SMEs in apprenticeships. Several activities, which have been adopted very successfully in countries with effective systems of apprenticeships, can also be implemented.

In detail, publicity campaigns may include a considerable number of traditional activities and practices such as the publication of leaflets (within a sectoral or local level), as well as the organization of meetings and conferences. Moreover, it can be implemented initiatives like “week of apprentice”, as implemented in countries like Germany. The purpose of the initiative is to bring in contact companies and potential apprentices, as well as, offer information regarding the participation in the program. In the same vein, and by taking advantage of the networking actions that have been implemented during the last years, it can be enhanced the practice of “Erasmus for enterprises”, as an extra motivation for entrepreneurs in order to get familiar with working environments and technologies from several countries.

Finally under the umbrella of intermediary networks canal so operate a website and social media (e.g. Facebook, LinkedIn), which will be responsible for offering all the necessary information to apprentices and businesses. Through the usage of electronic media, the intermediary networks will contribute to the supply-demand procedure of placements for apprenticeships, while it will enhance the procedure of networking, both between enterprises (see subchapter 4.3) or between enterprises and apprenticeship schools.

## 4. Creation of “Register for Cooperating Enterprises”

The basic aim of the “Register for Cooperating Enterprises” is the creation of a more “institutionalized” procedure regarding the renewal or the participation of new enterprises which are willing and eligible to offer an apprenticeship placement. By implementing a more established procedure it would be much easier to create sufficient cooperation between enterprises and apprenticeship schools. Through the operation of the “Register for Cooperating Enterprises” the intermediary networks will undertake the following works:

### *4.1 Definition of prerequisites for the participation of companies in apprenticeship programmes*

The definition of criteria for enterprises in order to participate in an apprenticeship program constitutes a necessary precondition in all the effective models. The intermediary mechanisms will undertake the task of defining the participation criteria, through the close cooperation of the involved parties (i.e. in the Greek case between public employment service (OAED), apprenticeship schools and social partners). The aim is to define specific preconditions for the participation of the businesses in the program, always in compliance with the concrete characteristics of each profession and the related educational needs, as described in the in the VET school curricula.

The criteria will be defined according to the necessities deriving from labour market needs, the specialties and the curricula offered by apprenticeship schools, and the legal framework regarding labour relations and working conditions. For the clear definition of the specific criteria a cooperative dialogue between all the involved parties (public employment service, social partners, state, chambers and involved ministries) is of great importance.

The defined criteria should take into consideration the current socioeconomic conditions, as well as, the limited participation of SMEs in apprenticeships and will target to the creation of an effective working and educating environment for both apprentices and businesses.

The procedure of criteria definition aims to identify work-based learning needs and deficiencies, in order to develop forms of cooperation between SMEs and networks of

companies that will reduce the possibility of excluding companies on account of their size(see subchapter 4.3).

#### ***4.2 Registration of companies and determination of the necessary apprenticeship placements***

The Apprenticeship Intermediary Networks will also be responsible for evaluating the suitability of companies to act as training venues. Both employer representatives and Vocational Education and Training schools will be involved in the evaluation procedure. On completion of this procedure, it will be clarified whether a company can provide the totality of the work-based learning content or only specific parts of the training programme. If this is not the case and the company is not able to provide all elements the company can cooperate with another company who provides the missing content in a form of a network. This means the young person will be placed in another enterprise company for completing the rest of the work based part. At the beginning of the apprenticeship it must be clear which company can take over which task and this has to be described in the apprenticeship contract, which will be signed by the enterprise, the apprenticeship school and the apprentice.

Furthermore, the intermediary network in cooperation with the apprenticeship schools will be responsible for defining the needs for apprenticeships placements annually. Following the specific task, the intermediary networks will be involved in renewing the register or assuring the availability of the cooperating enterprises for offering an apprenticeship placement, according to the needs of each specialty.

#### ***4.3 Forms of Cooperative between companies for providing apprenticeships placements***

The size of an enterprise constitutes a major parameter for offering an apprenticeship placement. In many cases, and especially in those of SMEs, it is possible that an enterprise cannot participate and offer the full number of tasks. In that case alternative forms of placements are adopted as it is the case in many countries. In Germany similar practices are implemented like the “lead enterprise with partner enterprises” model, the “Training to order” model, the “Training Consortium” model and the “Training association” model(Hensen- Reifgens and Hippach- Schneider, 2014: 10).

Following the above referred experience, the intermediary networks will be responsible for creating networks of enterprises. The aim of the specific networks will be the creation of clusters of enterprises in order to offer an apprenticeship placement according to the tasks that each enterprise is registered to cover (rotation principle). The tasks undertaken by each enterprise will be clearly defined in the apprenticeship contract. The specific model is closely related with the “Training Consortium model”, according to which “...several small and medium sized enterprises work together and take on apprentices. If one enterprise cannot obtain a specific content the apprentice goes to the other enterprise...” (Hensen- Reifgens and Hippach- Schneider, 2014: 10). In addition, the supporting services that will be offered under the umbrella of intermediary networks (see chapter 5) will also be in accordance with the “Training association model” and the services provided by the established organization. According to the specific model enterprises establish an organization for the purpose of the training, which is responsible for a number of organizational tasks (i.e. contracts), while participating enterprises are responsible for the training (Hensen- Reifgens and Hippach- Schneider, 2014: 10).

## 5. Supporting services for SMEs participating in apprenticeship programs

One main obstacle for the participation of SMEs in apprenticeships is the lack of support during their involvement in the program. The size of the enterprises, as well as, the current socioeconomic conditions constitutes inhibiting factors, since employers of SMEs are rather

reluctant to offer an apprenticeship placement. Intermediary mechanisms will be responsible for taking over a number of services an enterprise is obliged to fulfil during its participation in apprenticeships and minimize the burden of in house trainers. The specific services are related with “External training management” for SMEs which aims to support enterprises through the provision of the necessary information and advice, in order apprenticeship placements to respond to specific company needs (German Federal Ministry of Education and Research & European Social Fund, 2013: 11-13). Among others external training marketing aims to help enterprises with the implementation of training, the notification of companies regarding prerequisites and requirements of dual training, information regarding cooperative forms of enterprises and identification of suitable applicants and trainees.

### *5.1 Administrative and operational support for participating companies*

The intermediary mechanism through the “external training management” process will help companies to fulfil a number of administrative and operational issues, related to apprenticeships. In detail, one task undertaken will be provision of necessary information regarding apprenticeships contract according to the concrete characteristics of each case (i.e. tasks undertaken, age of apprentice, cooperative forms of SMEs). In the same context the mechanism will also operate as an information center for the involved enterprises, regarding a wide range of issues (i.e. legal, accounting, administrative, obligations) through the usage of several supporting means (website, social networks, mail, helpline).

The intermediary network can also help the company to the recruitment process of the apprentices. Before the beginning of the apprenticeship course, the company will participate in a procedure of customized business support service that will be implemented by the network. The aim of the specific service is to help the company to choose the most suitable apprentice according to his/her concrete skills and competences.

Moreover the intermediary network will undertake the task to monitor and evaluate opinions and proposals on behalf of the companies that participate in the programme. The regular communication of intermediary network with the involved enterprises makes it the most suitable institution to monitor and evaluate in a given period (i.e. every year) opinions and proposals regarding the effectiveness of the system by the participating businesses (i.e.

completion of questionnaire). The aim of the above mentioned activity is to offer the most up to date information concerning the operation of the system and consequently the proposing of changes according to the defined needs of the labour market.

Moreover, one major service of the intermediary network will be to monitor and inform involved enterprises regarding changes and amendments related to the apprenticeships program. The aim of the specific procedure is to define the obligations of the enterprises systematically.

## **Annex 1**

### **Prerequisites for the successful implementation and operation of intermediary networks**

(Adaptation to the Greek and Cyprus cases, based on the German guide: Bundesinstitut für Berufsbildung (2003): STARegio - Strukturverbesserung der Ausbildung in ausgewählten Regionen - Gestaltung von Ausbildungsverbänden. 2003. Bonn)

- The company should be informed about training occupations

- The number of apprentices should be in suitable proportion to the number of apprenticeship places and skilled workers (trainers) in the company.
- A provisional company training plan should be drawn up according to the corresponding training regulation.
- The training plan should be reviewed with regard to the content which is provided outside the company.
- Companies who sign the apprenticeship contract (parent-company) should have suitable training personnel and suitable equipment. The training could be complemented by periods of training in a partner-company. This means part of the apprenticeship may take place outside the parent-company.
- Companies where the personal and the professional qualifications of the trainer are not fulfilled should cooperate as partner-company with other companies. Among the relevant proposed models can be referred the "Training association" model (Ausbildungsverein) or "Lead enterprise with partner enterprise" model (LeitbetriebmitPartnerbetrieben).
- Ideal cooperative companies should be described.
- The provisional company training plan between the partners should be revised, while the timing and content of training should be described.
- Between the partners, a cooperation agreement should be agreed, in order to cover all relevant aspects of the training.
- Suitable candidates is preferable to be recruited and selected according to the professional and company requirements.
- The part of the training taking place outside the parent company should be described in the apprenticeship contract.
- A probation period can be agreed as a "practical aptitude control" between the parent-company and apprentice.
- The apprenticeship contract should be signed and given to all contracting partners.

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