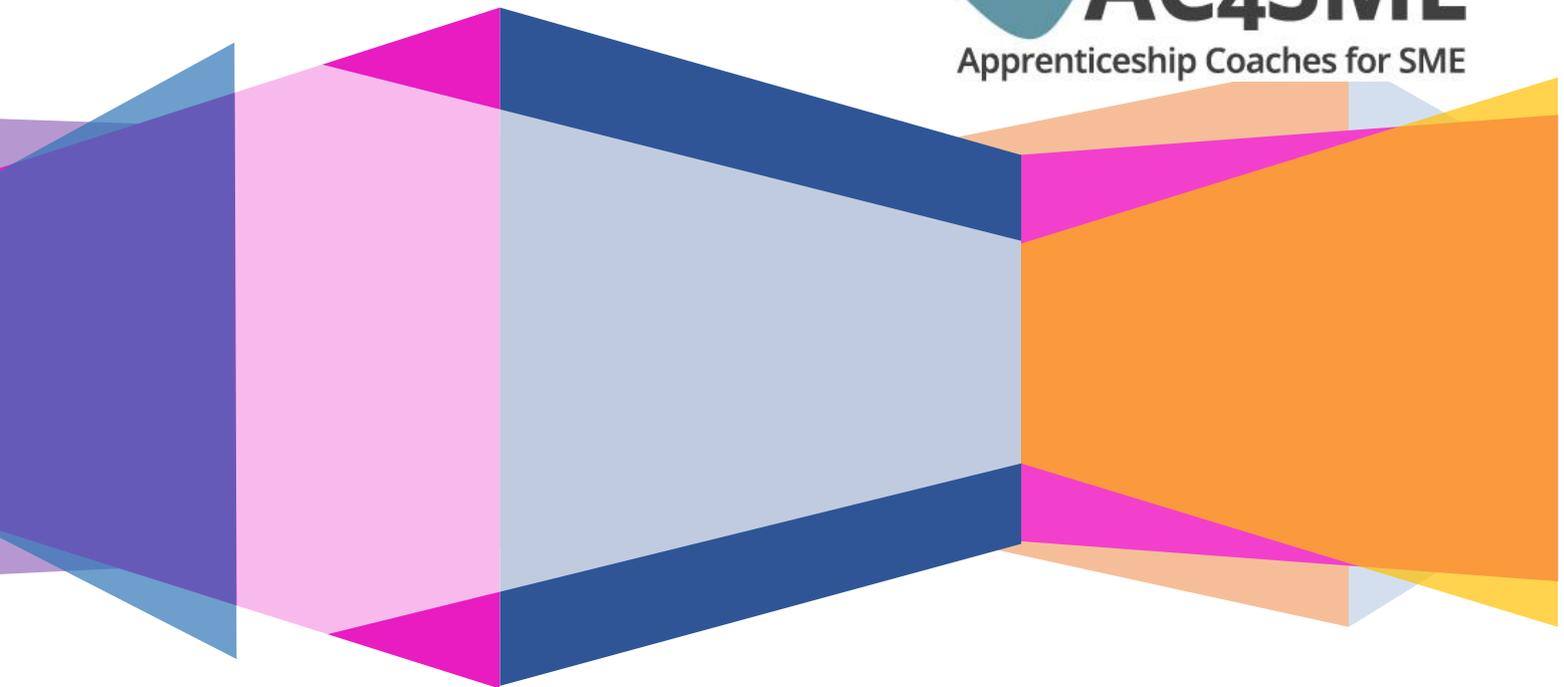


Voka CCI East-Flanders & EUROCHAMBRES
Belgium

Enter the name of the interviewer.

European report on interviews conducted by AC4SMEs partners



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Introduction

AC4SME is a large scale European project implemented by Chambers of Commerce & Industry in 12 Erasmus+ countries (AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, ES, FR, IT, LV, RO, RS, TR) and under the coordination of EUROCHAMBRES, the association of European Chambers of Commerce & Industry.

It is a response to the observation that small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) are less likely to take on apprentices than larger companies, whereas they represent two-thirds of private sector employment in Europe.

The main obstacles encountered by SMEs to offer apprenticeship placements may be a lack of time and human resources, too scarce knowledge of the legislation or administrative requirements and of the benefits of taking on apprentices.

The final aim of the AC4SME project is to involve a growing number of SMEs in apprenticeship.

AC4SME aims at developing and training a network of SME apprenticeship coaches in the CCIs, providing them with adequate tools to support SMEs in offering quality apprenticeship placements. Such a network of skilled apprenticeship support coaches for SMEs would impact positively the motivation and chances that SMEs have to engage in apprenticeship by providing advice to make the company ready for training apprentices. The project relies on an exchange of knowledge between Chambers that play a pivotal role in the involvement of SMEs in apprenticeship schemes as part of well-established VET systems and Chambers in other countries where SME involvement in apprenticeship schemes is under-developed or has scope for improvement.

Between November 2016 and March 2017 the AC4SMEs project partnership conducted interviews on apprenticeships and apprenticeship coaching all over Europe. Overall 86 company leaders, HR managers... from SMEs were interviewed in 11 Erasmus+ countries. This document provides you with insights on how companies experience apprenticeship coaching and where SMEs need extra guidance, how difficult or easy it is to find skilled workforce and how awareness could be raised about the benefits of hosting apprentices among SMEs.

The questionnaire was thoroughly put together by all partners during the Kick off meeting on October 24th and 25th at EUROCHAMBRES.

This document consist out of 2 parts. With the first part the partners tried to get better insights in how apprenticeship in its broadest form is perceived. The second part will go deeper in on what the project itself could do for SMEs in 11 Erasmus+ countries.

Part 1: Apprenticeship

Before going deeper into the results of the survey, it is important to emphasize that there was a discussion during the in-depth interviews on how difficult or easy it is for companies to find qualified personnel. All respondents (except those of CCI Nice) indicated that it appears to be increasingly difficult to find motivated and (technically) skilled workers. Regardless the sector in which the companies operate.

In this document you will get a summary of the responses received during the depth interview.

Results in-depth interviews Apprenticeship

What are the benefits of hosting an apprentice?

As the interviewed entrepreneurs experience more difficulties to find qualified employees, the hosting of an apprentice seems to be a good solution to find future employees. Enterprises get the opportunity letting someone get acquainted with the work field in an approachable way. Thanks to the in-company training, the required competencies can be acquired and the working attitude of the apprentice could be worked upon. Because of the hosting of an apprentice, enterprises could be able to work in a more innovative way. This is because the apprentice is able to gain new insights to the company or make some time free for current employees so as to focus on something else. From the interviews, it is remarkable that the hosting of an apprentice is particularly a company's philosophy. A lot of companies are willing to host apprentices because they see it as their duty to prepare youngsters for the labour market.

Nevertheless, the VET-system in a few countries seems to encounter difficulties with its image (we might think of Cyprus, Turkey, Belgium,...). This way, teenagers and their parents might often have a negative view towards this system because of preconceptions. Many of the jobs associated to his system, seem to have the perception of being less good jobs, as this is in the reality not always the case. This makes it even more difficult for SMEs to attract trainees.

Apprenticeship coaching is a business philosophy. We are working on the future and we are transmitting trades. It provides real chance to be able to share know-how from elsewhere and it is obviously a real added value. Apprentices are professionals who have a real place in our team.

How could awareness be raised about the benefits of hosting apprentices among SMEs?

Awareness should be raised from different angles.

The government could be able to reward incentives to make it financially more interesting for companies to attract an apprentice. Of course, this depends from country to country. For example, apprentices in Belgium do not receive a financial compensation for the work delivered, whereas in Italy there are a lot of different financial incentives given by the government. Though, governments are able to make promotion for the VET-system on a large scale by proposing role models to inspire younger people and by removing judgements by their parents. In addition, governments could untangle the administration making it administratively easier for a company to host an apprentice.

Furthermore, CCIs can form a bridge between – on the one hand – the SMEs and on the other hand the schools. The water between both parties often seems to be very deep. A lot of education programmes do not seem to be future-proof. This is why the discrepancy between the educational institution and the companies remain to exist.

Spurred by this project and thanks to the widespread network of CCIs, an (online) club of “Apprenticeship Ambassadors” could arise. These ambassadors will share best practices at European level to persuade other SMEs to be a host for an apprentice. These could have a positive effect on the perception a lot of people have nowadays on VET-training. In addition, there are CCI information sessions organised for schools and SMEs.

Are you aware of the apprenticeship system and its framework (legal, infrastructure, obligations...) in your country? Do you know how it operates?

The vast majority of participants know the apprenticeship system and its frameworks. Nevertheless there are still quite some unclear issues for our SMEs. But we have to point out that these things should be tackled on a local level.

What are the challenges to host apprentices?

Enterprises encounter every day various challenges.

Educational programmes are not tuned in to the needs of the industry. Because of this, it is difficult to offer an internship that – on the one hand – has to take into account the requirements stated in the curriculum of the intern and – on the other hand – the specific needs of the industry.

Training and following-up an apprentice needs time and people who have the experience. A lot of SMEs have too few employees and experience to do this.

In addition, one may not underestimate the paperwork companies have to deal with when hosting an apprentice.

The apprentice is a collaborator like any other. There is no distinction between the employee and the apprentice. Our role is to make him responsible in his function and to accompany him step by step so that he ends up conveying an image of our company that is consistent with the one we have set ourselves. Then we will have successfully integrated apprentices

Furthermore, the apprentice himself can encounter difficulties as well. This would often not exhibit the desired work attitude. A lot of youngsters do not possess good communication and social skills. Which are things they should be trained in on school. Within the scope of Work Health and Safety, companies undertake big responsibilities. Apprentices are often youngsters and are unable to assess certain situations concerning Work Health & Safety properly.

For experienced SMEs: How could you overcome the challenges faced & which improvements were made?

Enterprises who already have been experienced for a few years, all seem to have one thing in common. They all provide (pedagogic) training for their in-company trainers and coaches. In addition, they provide enough colleagues who take on the role of a mentor. Coaches need to be able to have sufficient time for an apprentice because a daily follow-up is required. It is also necessary to communicate with the apprentice, his/her family sometimes, and the school. This is a "marriage of three".

Which types of profile do you need? What level of schooling should apprentices have completed?

Interns do not seem to have a specific profile. Young people trained in the VET-system to students trained at the University, are sought. Although we need to notice that technical profiles are more frequently sought.

What skills do you already have in your company to guide an apprentice?

The skills that the interviewed enterprises already have in-house seem to differ very sharply. These range from employees who are certified by the German Ministry of Education (as in Latvia) to qualified technicians and operators on staff with extensive educational and psychological skills. One of the interviewees founded a VET unit and has 25 in-company trainers. In that company, they even use a special method for selecting and guiding apprentices according to their skills and interests. Many of the in-house knowledge also appears to depend on how advanced the dual learning and VET-system is in the countries of the interviewees.

As we have experience hosting trainees, we have acquired certain skills about communication, assertive, empathetic...Our people has initiative, are good transmitters of knowledge and guidance to internal and external customer. Through the student/trainee we are also selling the company

Should more responsibility be given to schools? Should teachers be considered as mentors?

Overall there is a consensus that teachers shouldn't be considered as mentors. This role should solely be given to mentors within companies. But schools do need to take up their responsibility. They need to recognise that there still is a great gap between schools and what companies need. Teachers should teach children about behavioural sciences, they should prepare their students for work life.

Schools should understand that flexibility is needed to tailor student schedules to business. Teachers must communicate with the company, understand the real world of companies. We have had a teacher of a local VET Training Center for 2 months coming every Friday to know what we do and talk directly with the dieticians and responsible.

Would you hire an apprentice after the end of his/her apprenticeship?

All interviewees would recruit an apprentice provided that he or she has managed to acquire the right skills. And when that person also happens to have the right working attitude.

Part 2: AC4SMEs

Through the Chambers networks over 50,000 SMEs in 12 European regions are offered an efficient and quality support based on methods applied successfully in Austria and Germany adapted to countries specificities and on adequate tools designed for them. Among them a minimum of 450 participate in workshops and 120 receive face-to-face guidance. The focus is especially on SMEs that have not yet been involved in apprenticeship schemes, therefore it should lead to a direct increase in the supply of apprenticeship placements. The tools developed and training received by apprenticeship coaches ensure that quality apprenticeship placements are offered.

The project will also result in a network of 26 trained apprenticeship coaches in CCIs in 10 European countries well placed to promote apprenticeship, inform about the apprenticeship schemes and training contracts, keep on accrediting new businesses, train trainers within SMEs, help SMEs to select suitable apprentices and communicate desired learning outcomes to the trainers. AC4SME establishes the foundations for a European Network of Apprenticeship coaches.

In this section we will discuss the possible solutions we could offer through AC4SMEs to SMEs in 12 Erasmus+ countries.

Results in-depth interviews AC4SMEs

How could an apprenticeship coach from a CCI support your SME in hosting apprenticeship?

There are several things in which an apprenticeship coach from a CCI could support SMEs:

- Raise awareness among SMEs about the benefits of hosting apprentices and inform them about the functioning of apprenticeship schemes.
- Identify, select, train and mentor trainers within SMEs on a regular basis.
- Communicate curricula content and desired learning outcomes to the trainers to ensure quality apprenticeships.
- Enhance communication between apprentice and company trainers.
- Increasing communication and cooperation between schools and companies.
- Provide a contact point for apprentices, schools and businesses in order to provide advice and resolve problems.
- Establish the foundations for a European Network of Apprenticeship coaches.
- Development of a small guide for the in-company trainer.
- Recruit and accredit new businesses.
- Assist SMEs in the selection of suitable apprentices.

But most of all the apprenticeship coach must train companies that have never received apprentices. He or she must explain to them that apprenticeship will make the company grow and open it to experiences they have not yet imagined. The apprenticeship coach must therefore be there to reassure, demystify, help, accompany the company and inform it about the role of the training center in setting up apprenticeship (mediation function).

Which tools / activities could support SMEs in hosting apprenticeships?

The following tools were most often identified as most sought-after:

- Documents and templates concerning the legal framework to host an apprentice.
- Tools on how to evaluate/validate apprenticeships.
- Guidelines requirements for companies on VET providers, examinations and training regulations.
- Small guide for the in-company trainer.
- In-company training plan (outlining what the trainee has to learn and a timeline).
- Marketing materials to promote apprenticeships.
- Aspects to guarantee a quality apprenticeship.
- Apprenticeship schemes, curricula content and desired learning outcome.
- Organize platform for students and companies with aim to find common interests.
- Help in development of legal environment in certain countries like Latvia.
- Practical training programme for company mentors.
- Self-assessment tools (to self-assess skills of our internal coaches).
- Training sessions for in-company mentor. The training should focus on HR management, motivating, evaluating.
- Tools for monitoring and evaluation.
- Checklist procedures to assess the suitability of new companies.

How could an apprenticeship coach help SMEs to select suitable apprentices and provide legal and practical assistance regarding the training contract?

There are different ways in which an apprenticeship coach could help SMEs to select suitable apprentices and provide legal and practical assistance regarding the training contract:

- By providing assistance and guidelines for companies acting as a contact point for apprentices, schools and businesses.
- By analysing students interest and motivation to be trained in certain company.
- By communicating regularly with companies, analysing company's needs.
- By providing consultations regarding contracts.
- Support in selection, especially about motivational aspects.
- By visiting SMEs and explaining them the whole process as well as having direct contact with SMEs.
- By asking SMEs through questionnaires their needs about this issues so support can be adapted.
- By let them know the differences options to host apprentices.
- By let them know the legal requirements to train apprentices in company.
- By being the common bond between schools and SMEs.
- By doing vocational guidance to apprentices so their skills can match with SMEs needs.
- by developing a user-friendly checklist for SMEs.
- By meeting the needs of all parties and act as mediator to achieve the best results expected by all participants: vet school, company and apprentice
- By providing specific programs for SMEs advise on the legal level

How could an apprenticeship coach identify and train in-company mentor within your SMEs on a regular basis?

An apprenticeship coach will have to take up different roles. He/she will be a bridge figure between education and the labor market. He/she will be the person who must try to translate curricula and desired learning outcomes between the school and also the company.

The apprenticeship coach will fulfill his role as coach by helping companies create programs for their internal mentors. The AC can also develop short “keeping up” sessions.

The project consortium, could develop a test which can tell whether an employee would be an appropriate mentor. This test could also indicate which skills are to be strengthened and which are already sufficiently available.

In addition, the AC will be the person who informs mentors continuously on changes in (local) legislation, (European) trends concerning hosting apprentices... And he will be the one who can help with the marketing and promotion of VET programs and dual learning.

