



European
Commission

EAfa



Awareness raising and Guidance for Apprenticeships

Launched in 2013, the [European Alliance for Apprenticeships \(EAfa\)](#) is a multi-stakeholder platform aiming to strengthen the quality, supply and image of apprenticeships, as well as the mobility of apprentices in Europe and beyond. EAfa aims to do so through national commitments by public authorities and voluntary pledges from stakeholders, and by providing practical information and increasing knowledge exchange on apprenticeships.

Why awareness raising and guidance are important

Effective awareness raising and guidance are key for apprenticeships and are important for individuals, employers, and the economy in general:

- For the **economy and employers**, they can help to develop a better match between the skills in the population and available employment opportunities, enabling the labour market to function more effectively and helping to tackle skill shortages.
- For **individuals**, guidance and awareness raising activities are vital in helping young people and adults alike to make informed choices about their professional pathways and to develop the skills they need to manage their careers.

Awareness raising and guidance are **needed now more than ever**. Changes in skills needs have become more rapid in recent years driven by technological developments, most recently by Artificial Intelligence (AI), and the onset of the green transition. Guidance services and awareness raising are essential to keeping pace with such developments, as they can guide individuals to relevant opportunities, and **promote the benefits of apprenticeships**.

So critical are guidance services and awareness raising that they should be an **integral part of any learning and skills system**. This has been recognised at European level through their inclusion in the [European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships \(EFQEA\)](#).

Awareness raising and guidance in the EFQEA

Criterion 12 of the Framework states: 'Career guidance, mentoring and learner support should be provided to ensure successful outcomes and reduce drop-outs'.

Awareness raising and guidance are also strongly linked to two other EFQEA criteria: criterion 14 on quality assurance and graduate tracking as data on graduate destinations can provide valuable data to inform future choices on apprenticeships; and criterion 11 on flexible pathways and mobility where advice and guidance can help people to make the best career choices considering available information on learning and employment opportunities.

Awareness raising and guidance services are **closely interlinked but distinct areas**. Awareness raising can be considered a first step in promoting apprenticeships to potential apprentices and encompasses methods to communicate the benefits of apprenticeships to potential target audiences. Guidance services consist of direct one-to-one or group support to people to help them to make informed choices. In this factsheet, we explore what these two entail.

What is awareness raising?

Awareness raising spans a wide range of activities designed to attract people to apprenticeships as a means of achieving their employment and career goals. Such activities can be targeted at people across the age range from young children in primary school (see ‘Skills for Life’ example below) to adults in the workplace who need to upskill or reskill. Getting the right mix of communication methods for the target audience concerned is key, and this is especially the case when the target audience consists of people in disadvantaged communities, as elaborated further below. The range of methods to choose from includes:

- Campaigns in traditional and digital channels including radio, TV, social media and email campaigns, press conferences, advertising, direct mailing, etc.
- Use of promotional materials (e.g. leaflets and posters)
- Participation in job fairs, especially for school leavers
- Organising skills competitions (e.g. Euroskills, World Skills)
- Working in partnership with Public Employment Services (PES), recruitment organisations and online jobs portals to highlight apprenticeships.

Aside from generally raising awareness, these activities can also be used to push key occupations and sectors experiencing skills shortages and promote topics such as better gender balance and enhanced participation by people with disabilities.

Awareness raising activities benefit from involving a **broad pool of stakeholders**, each of which can access slightly different target audiences and has different skills and experiences to share. For example:

- **Companies** can provide access to workplaces through company visits, tasters and by giving presentations to explain the benefits of vocational education and training (VET) and apprenticeships.
- The positive experiences of **apprenticeship graduates** can be harnessed, such as getting them to take part in general promotion activities (e.g. through testimonials) as well as having them become mentors for potential and new apprentices (e.g. through the creation of apprenticeship ambassadors and networks, such as the [European Apprentices Network](#)).
- **Role models and celebrities**, including social media influencers can be engaged to raise the profile of apprenticeships.

For more on this topic, see the EAFA online training module on ‘[Communicating apprenticeships to learners and providers](#)’.

What is guidance?

Guidance services may go by a variety of names¹ and definitions across countries but have been defined by the European Commission, Cedefop and a range of other international organisations as:

‘... the services which help people of any age to manage their careers and to make the educational, training and occupational choices that are meaningful for them. It helps people to reflect on their ambitions, interests, qualifications, skills and talents – and to relate this knowledge about who they are to who they might become in life and work².’

Guidance can be delivered face-to-face or at a distance, to individuals or as a group provision. The most highly developed guidance services seek to provide a seamless service to individuals across the course of their lives – **lifelong guidance**. Hence guidance can be provided in different contexts, three of which are relevant to apprenticeships:

- **in schools** for learners, parents or teachers;
- **outside school** (involving PES, NGOs, Chambers, and others) for young people not in education, employment or training (NEETs)/unemployed/ adults or people leaving higher education (either early or on graduation) who may wish to opt for a more employment-oriented programme;
- **during the apprenticeship programme**, supporting apprentices through their apprenticeship and onwards into employment (post-apprenticeship advice and guidance).

In these different contexts, provision needs to be **tailored appropriately**. For example, guidance for young people should ideally involve parents, especially for NEETs and people with disabilities, so that they can be reassured that an apprenticeship is the right choice for their child and that there are further career opportunities for them. In addition, young people face a range of learning and employment options, including tracks into higher education, so promoting the skills and employability benefits of apprenticeships is key. In contrast, adults accessing apprenticeships see them as a means of upskilling and reskilling but typically have family and domestic commitments which may make it hard to take on an apprenticeship because it represents an intensive and long-term commitment; guidance will have to be adjusted accordingly to bring such issues to the fore.

1. Depending on the country, guidance may be called ‘career counselling’, ‘career development’, ‘careers information, advice and guidance’, ‘vocational counselling’ or ‘vocational guidance’, amongst others.

2. Cedefop, European Commission, ETF, ILO, OECD, UNESCO (2021) [Investing in Career Guidance](#).

As a minimum, guidance involves providing young people and adults with the information they need to make informed decisions about why apprenticeships might be a good option for them and which sector or occupational area would be a good choice. However, it can go much further than this to encompass a range of activities that help people identify the skills they already have, match them to available apprenticeship opportunities and enhance their career management skills.

Assessing individuals' skills and professional preferences

- Bringing people's existing skills – both technical and transversal/soft – to the surface, along with their interests and ambitions, to match them against professional pathway opportunities. People may not be aware of all the skills they have and how these might relate to potential apprenticeship or employment opportunities.
- Using detailed information on skills in occupations to support the matching process. Young people and adults switching careers may be choosing a future professional pathway on which they have variable knowledge informed by patchy pieces of information from teachers/trainers, family and friends, so it is important that such knowledge deficits are addressed.
- A range of methods can be used to assess skills and preferences, such as one-to-one or group discussions/counselling, unpacking the content of individuals' qualifications and conducting tests (e.g. psychometric tests), which probe individuals' aptitudes.

Developing career management skills

- Supporting individuals to develop their capabilities to manage their *future* learning and employment pathways.
- Using information gathered from skills assessments to identify gaps in relation to the career management skills people need and how best to address them.
- Developing skills in a range of areas including job search techniques, professional communication, decision-making and behaviour, CV and application drafting, and job interview techniques, as well as skills for self-employment (e.g. basic marketing and financial management).

Support for Alternating Learning – European Social Fund Plus (ESF+), Flanders, Belgium

The project '*Ondersteuning Altemerend Leren*' is implemented by Profo, a non-governmental organisation (NGO) in Flanders. It aims to guide young people towards labour market participation via a comprehensive offer of guidance, training and work opportunities for young people enrolled in dual learning. The methodology of working with participants through these three phases is defined based on their individual needs. To accomplish this, the initiative is based on the cooperation of NGOs, education providers and companies within the regional sectoral landscape, and is divided into three phases:

- During the **orientation** phase, participants' individual objectives and skills needs are defined in a 'SMART' plan³ together with the education provider.
- Participants receive **education and training** according to their individual needs, such as job application training, or workplace learning.
- In the third phase, participants are placed according to their skills and development opportunities in one of the 359 partner companies for their **work-based training**.

The project budget is EUR 2 148 298.94 divided between three school years (2022/23–2024/25). For more information, visit the [Profo website](#) (in Dutch).

3. SMART objectives are Specific, Measurable, Actionable, Realistic and Timebound.

Reaching out to disadvantaged communities

Making sure that apprenticeships are accessible to all is an important principle in Europe. The provision of guidance for ‘pupils and adults in difficulty’ and the need to have ‘easy access to guidance and counselling services, adapted to their needs’ appeared in the [Bordeaux Communiqué on enhanced European cooperation in VET](#) (2008) and continues to develop as a key part of apprenticeships across the Member States.

In addition to tackling socio-economic inequalities, it is also important to help tackle skills shortages by bringing people (back) into the labour market and making sure young people especially can make a full contribution to society in the context of an ageing population.

Reaching out to disadvantaged communities typically requires not just the activities described above but also some different and more intensive types of support. For example, it can involve⁴:

- Mapping and tracking services to identify and monitor students and offer them support during school-to-work transitions, as well as sharing data amongst agencies such as youth and social services and community groups to identify young people who might have left school early and who could be attracted back into formal learning and work through apprenticeships.
- Adapting communication strategies so that they are appropriate to the target group, including by using appropriate language, adjusting writing styles and being culturally sensitive, and working through existing contact points, such as integrated multi-agency services and collaborating with community groups and grassroots NGOs who know and understand their local communities.
- Using skills assessment and career management skills development techniques that are focused on the capabilities of the target group, e.g. offering (more intensive) coaching and mentoring to identify existing skills and establish professional and learning objectives, and providing training in tasks like CV preparation that avoid overly academic approaches (given that young people in need of support may have had negative experiences in general education).

Supporting Youth Integration through Apprenticeship in Île-de-France – ESF+, France

Through this project, the National Association of Apprentices in France (ANAF) promotes apprenticeship or pre-apprenticeship opportunities for disadvantaged youth, for example, NEETs or those facing integration difficulties or significant barriers to entering training or employment. The initiative aims to support 50 people annually, who benefit from guidance activities. The ‘*Film Your Profile*’ activity uses video tools to help participants create video CVs, identify their transferable skills, and learn how to present themselves effectively. Participants’ video profiles are then shared on a platform that is visible to training providers, employers and pre-apprenticeship programmes. Through the ‘*Apprenticeship Mentoring*’ activity, volunteer mentors provide individual support to participants, such as defining their career goals, networking, CV or application support, technical assistance (e.g. training search) and administrative guidance (e.g. contracts). The programme will run between 2023 and 2027 with a budget of EUR 18 214 140.00 (with EUR 7 285 656.00 from ESF+). More information is available [here](#) (in French).

Vocational Integration through Apprenticeship Support – ESF+, German-speaking Community, Belgium

The project ‘*Berufliche Integration durch Ausbildungsbegleitung (BIDA)*’ offers guidance to young people and young adults interested in dual training but who do not (yet) meet apprenticeship requirements or have no chance of remaining in the training system long-term. The project aims to offer employment contracts with professional qualifications to 20 people annually, familiarising students with vocational schooling and daily work life. The initiative offers an orientation programme for vocational integration and supports language learning in apprenticeships and training. The budget comprises EUR 182 775.58 from ESF+ and an equal amount from the German-speaking Community, and spans between October 2022 and the end of 2024. More information is available on the [BIDA website](#) (in German).

4. For further details, see European Commission (2018) [Effective outreach to NEETs: Experience from the ground](#).

Keys to success

In this section, we identify several factors that contribute to the success of awareness raising and guidance.

Good quality labour market data

Effective guidance is built on good quality information about job opportunities in the labour market and the advantages of apprenticeships. Such information is key in making a better match between the skills people have or will develop and the needs of employers. In recent years, progress has been made in developing better skills intelligence (see, for example, work by [Cedefop](#)), identifying labour shortages (see work by the [European Labour Authority](#)) and integrating data into guidance processes (see example in the box below). Digital technologies have an increasingly significant role to play, being able to gather detailed data in real-time from online job advertisements on where skills demands are strongest, salaries, terms and conditions of employment, progression opportunities and other characteristics such as scope for foreign travel. Similarly, [graduate tracking systems](#) have been developed which can provide helpful data on apprenticeship graduate destinations, employment rates and salaries, etc.

Smart Energy Systems Campus – France

In the Auvergne-Rhône Alpes region of France, the 'Smart Energy Systems Campus' aims to meet skill and training needs related to the transition to greener forms of energy. As one of several *Campuses des métiers et qualifications* (Centres for Jobs and Qualifications) dedicated to this task in France, the Smart Energy Systems Campus brings together over 100 partners from industry, VET, higher education, research and local government to: identify regional skill needs; raise awareness and provide guidance about opportunities in the sector; and develop appropriate training solutions including apprenticeships. As part of its activities, the Campus has conducted a survey on the energy transition to quantify the needs of the regional hydrogen sector in terms of skills and training and to provide a regional map of key stakeholders. In addition, guidance counsellors have tested a game, the 'Game of Professions', designed to raise young people's awareness of the range of professions within industrial sectors relevant to the energy transition and the diversity of training pathways open to them to reach their desired goals. Other activities include: an 'ambassadors' scheme, through which company representatives visit VET schools to talk about their backgrounds and how and why they entered their profession; and the making of videos that are published on social media.

More information is available through the [French government website on the national network of Campuses des métiers et qualifications](#) and the [Smart Energy Systems Campus website](#) (in French).



Involving all relevant stakeholders

Awareness raising and guidance need to involve a wide range of stakeholders – not just potential apprentices and guidance professionals. School teachers and parents are a key influence on young people, for example, and need to be provided with the knowledge and skills to help youth make the right choices during their school careers and into adulthood. Employers and workers also have key roles. They bring first-hand and local information about what is happening in the jobs market – providing a crucial supplement to the types of data gathered through national and regional skills anticipation systems. They also provide authentic insights into the reality of workplaces that help people in their career decisions. Existing workers who act as role models and mentors to apprentices can provide them with informal career guidance. Trade unions help their members with access to guidance services and cooperate with providers of VET to support guidance activities.

Skills for Life – Erasmus+, StartNet Europe

The *'Skills for Life – Orientation Toolbox for Life Design'* project, initiated within the European StartNet network, aims to empower educators across Europe to provide effective pre-career guidance to young people aged 13–14 and enhance students' ability to make informed educational choices. The tools developed within the project are designed to support young people's choices, whether they wish to continue with 'general education' or take a vocational learning path. The Skills for Life Toolbox is jointly developed by all project partners, around 500 educators and 10 000 students in Belgium, Germany, Italy and Romania. It is composed of:

- An **online self-evaluation tool** to help students discover their strengths, weaknesses, priorities, interests and personality types.
- A **board game** to help students match their characteristics and those of different job profiles and economic sectors in a playful way.
- Teaching modules and a **half-day training** to teach educators to deliver these activities.

The project outcomes have been disseminated to school directors, educators, counsellors, local authorities, Chambers of Commerce and other stakeholders, helping to raise awareness of the need to introduce guidance and orientation to students at a younger age. More information is available at the [StartNet website](#).

Making effective use of digital technologies

Digital technologies are reaching into all aspects of apprenticeships, and awareness raising and guidance are no exception. As already noted above, digital technologies are increasingly being used in innovative ways to gather labour market data and to reach out to potential apprentices as part of promotion campaigns. They are also being incorporated into guidance services. A key issue is how to best balance the use of digital tools with face-to-face contact provided by guidance professionals or teachers providing guidance advice. An inspiring example of using digital guidance technologies in the school context is presented below.

'Hola Futuro' – Fundación Empresa Familiar De Castilla Y León, Spain

The *'Hola Futuro'* initiative is led by the Fundación Empresa Familiar De Castilla Y León and has been recognised as a Project of Singular Interest for Vocational Training by the Ministry of Education, Vocational Training and Sports. The initiative offers tools for vocational and career guidance to support counsellors, families, and students in decision-making regarding academic and professional futures, focusing on promoting vocational training, especially dual vocational training. The project has developed several digital tools that have been implemented in classrooms, for example:

- The **'Neolkigai Platform'**, which connects learners to the local labour market by providing information about career opportunities and professions that best suit each individual's interests and profile.
- The **'Space Room'**, which is an escape room game that facilitates the discovery of different professions through a virtual space.
- The **'Atrapa la FP'** mobile application, which is based on the above-mentioned game, helps secondary students learn about the experience in a workspace through augmented reality and the vocational training on offer in the region.

In addition, the organisation promotes training and apprenticeships through a social media communication campaign, showing inspirational videos and success stories of previous VET students. Through its digital and innovative approach, and collaboration with the local government and SMEs, the project aims to improve young people's innovation and entrepreneurship skills and foster economic and social development in the region. For more information, visit the [Fundación Empresa Familiar De Castilla Y León website](#).

Further resources

- Cedefop (2008) [The Bordeaux Communiqué on enhanced European cooperation in vocation education and training](#)
- Cedefop, [CareersNet](#)
- Cedefop, European Commission, ETF, ILO, OECD, UNESCO (2021) [Investing in Career Guidance](#)
- Cedefop, [Skills Intelligence](#)
- Cedefop, [VET graduate tracking](#)
- [Euroguidance Network](#)
- European Alliance for Apprenticeships, [Communicating apprenticeships to learners and providers](#)
- European Commission (2018) [Effective outreach to NEETs: Experience from the ground](#)
- European Labour Authority (2023) [Labour shortages and surpluses in Europe 2023](#)

